

North Dakota Department of Agriculture

Aug. 6, 2007

Editors/New Directors:

The following is offered as a letter to the editor or an op-ed piece. If you have any questions, please call me at (701) 328-2231.

Thanks

Roger Johnson

The naysayers who do not believe or do not want you to believe in the potential of ethanol have recently changed their tune.

Until recently, they were lamenting ethanol's supposedly negative energy balance, that it yields less energy than is needed to produce it.

Wrong! In fact, it takes less than 35,000 BTUs to turn corn into a gallon of ethanol, while a gallon of ethanol offers at least 77,000 BTUs. That's a positive energy balance. A recent U.S. Department of Agriculture study finds ethanol providing a net energy gain of at least 77 percent.

Now, the anti-ethanol chorus wants us to believe the demand for corn for ethanol production is solely responsible for driving up the cost of food. Call it the "Food versus Fuel Blues."

Farmers can only wish that commodity prices have such a major impact on the cost of food. Farmers make only pennies on every dollar Americans spend on food. When USDA announced record corn plantings for 2007, did food prices fall? No. Then, when corn prices plummeted, did food prices follow suit? Of course not. When corn was \$2 a bushel, a box of corn flakes contained 2.2 cents worth of corn. When the price of corn doubled, the value of the corn in the box of corn flakes also doubled to a whole 4.4 cents!

The principal reason for the rising cost of food was and is \$70-a-barrel oil, much of it imported. It is the increased cost of petroleum, not corn, that is driving up the cost of the average grocery bill food to the tune of \$10 per week.

In the meantime, ethanol offers us the opportunity to produce and consume more of our own energy. Ethanol is not the entire solution to America's energy crisis, but is certainly a part of that solution.

Food versus fuel? Don't believe a word of it. America's corn farmers can meet our food, feed and fuel needs.

Sincerely,



Roger Johnson

Agriculture Commissioner