



Renewable Energy Issue Brief

Renewable energy generated from forest materials and byproducts hold greater promise than other energy sources, making America's private forests vital to the nation's renewable energy efforts.

As America seeks to reduce its dependence on fossil fuels – and particularly imported energy – many are looking to homegrown renewable energy as a viable solution. U.S. efforts to produce renewable transportation fuels have largely focused on corn ethanol to date. However, as the need for renewable fuel sources increases, it is clear that corn alone will not meet the growing demand. Demand will likely intensify as global food prices continue to rise and the “food versus fuel” debate continues.

Part of the answer is to use cellulosic sources, such as forest materials and wood scraps, to produce “second generation renewable fuels” that are more energy efficient to produce. Cellulosic ethanol, for example, is more than three times as efficient to produce as corn ethanol, which means more alternative energy can be generated with less energy input.

Additionally, these second generation renewable fuels hold greater potential than corn ethanol because they can be made from parts of trees and shrubs, other forest and agricultural residues, or dedicated energy crops grown on marginal lands without the water and nutrient inputs required by food grains.

America's well-managed forests will play an important role in meeting U.S. energy needs in the future. U.S. policies should encourage investment in forests as a source of renewable energy, by establishing non-restrictive definitions of forest biomass eligible for use in renewable energy programs.

The government should invest in research, technology transfer and production incentives for second generation renewable fuels from cellulosic sources, as it has for first generation fuels, such as corn ethanol. Incentives for producers of second generation renewable fuels will help establish a robust bio-fuels production infrastructure in the U.S.