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University of Minnesota Research Overlooks Technology Innovations in Corn Ethanol

Sioux Falls, SD (February 3, 2009) – New research out of the University of Minnesota attempts to estimate the environmental and health costs of transportation fuels, but bases its findings on erroneous assumptions about corn-based ethanol, the American Coalition for Ethanol (ACE) stated today.

“I’m disappointed with what appears to be another politically motivated study with an ax to grind against corn ethanol,” said Brian Jennings, Executive Vice President of ACE. “The steps our nation must take regarding climate change and energy policy must be founded on the most thorough and defensible science, but this paper does not represent a meaningful contribution to the discussion surrounding these critical issues.”

The study, “Climate change and health costs of air emissions from biofuels and gasoline,” was conducted by the University of Minnesota’s Institute on the Environment and will be published in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* this month.

In its calculation of the emissions associated with corn-based ethanol, the research mistakenly assumes that additional corn for ethanol production will be grown on land currently enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Secondly, the study relies on the controversial theory of “indirect land use change,” which states that if crops in the U.S. are displaced for biofuel production, the result is a change in land use in other countries and a substantial carbon debt which should be attributed directly to biofuels.

“The two primary assumptions this paper relies upon to discredit corn ethanol disregard the technology innovations which are helping farmers produce additional corn and companies produce ethanol more efficiently. The belief that CRP land will be converted to grow corn altogether ignores the dramatic yield improvements experienced in corn production, which will allow America’s farmers to produce more food, fiber, and fuel on the same cropland. Secondly, there is no consensus in the scientific community on whether ‘indirect land use change’ can be fairly or factually attributed to biofuels demand here in the U.S.,” Jennings added.

While the research adds “indirect effects” to biofuels’ overall emissions tally, ACE points out that it neglects to ascribe those same indirect effects to the use of more fossil fuel. If “indirect effects” can be added to the carbon footprint of biofuels, then the emissions and expense to society of U.S. military presence in other nations, for example, should also be counted toward the footprint of fossil fuels.

“The reality is that, thanks to new and ever-improving technologies in farming and ethanol production, corn ethanol is getting more efficient every day, while petroleum is becoming more expensive to extract, more inefficient to produce, and more harmful to the environment,” Jennings added.

The claims made by this paper conflict with those of two recent peer-reviewed scientific articles. “[Improvements in Life Cycle Energy Efficiency and Greenhouse Gas Emissions of Corn Ethanol](#)”, published in the *Journal of Industrial Ecology*, finds that the lifecycle GHG emissions of modern corn-based ethanol production are on average 51 percent lower than that of gasoline. “[Biofuels, Land Use Change, and GHG Emissions: Some Unexplored Variables](#)”, published in *Environmental Science and Technology*, studied “indirect land use change” and found that “holding domestic industries responsible for greenhouse gas emissions by their competitors worldwide through market forces is fraught with a host of ethical and pragmatic difficulties.”

For more information about ethanol or about lifecycle analysis of biofuels’ carbon footprint, visit www.ethanol.org.

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The American Coalition for Ethanol (ACE) is the grassroots voice of the U.S. ethanol industry, a national trade association for the ethanol industry with 1500 members nationwide, including farmers, ethanol producers, commodity organizations, businesses supplying goods and services to the ethanol industry, rural electric cooperatives, and individuals supportive of increased production and use of ethanol. For more information about ethanol or ACE, visit www.ethanol.org or call (605) 334-3381.