

Path to Sustainable Bioenergy in United States Will Require a New Roadmap

New report calls for strong agriculture and energy policies that create jobs, curb global warming pollution, enhance national security, protect wildlife and uphold soil and water quality.

WASHINGTON, D.C. (March 30)—The vast potential of plant-based energy sources to create jobs, curb global warming and protect wildlife could be a reality in the United States—but not without changes in federal policies that have created an unsustainable first generation of biofuels, according to a new report released today by the National Wildlife Federation.

"Plant-based energy sources can play an important role in helping our nation create jobs, transition to a clean energy economy and confront global warming," said Julie Sibbing, director of Global Warming, Agriculture and Wildlife at the National Wildlife Federation and co-author of the report. "However, we will need a new roadmap."

Harvesting plant-based crops to produce energy to power cars, homes, businesses and communities—so-called bioenergy—has long been recognized as an important strategy for helping the nation transition away from fossil fuels and toward an economy based on clean, renewable sources of energy.

"Successful, sustainable bioenergy projects have started to take root in the United States, yet are not being adequately supported by current federal policies," said Sibbing. "This report underscores the urgent need for the U.S. Congress and Obama Administration to enact solutions that support domestic plant-based energy sources that create jobs, enhance national security, protect wildlife and curb global warming pollution."

Biomass already produces 15 times more renewable energy for the United States than wind and solar combined. It holds the promise for creating heat, electricity and fuel from a variety of sources. Perennial grasses grown on marginal lands, studies suggest, can produce two to three times more energy per acre than existing grain crops—with fewer expensive up-front costs, leading to improved farmer income.

The report sets out several visions for what a sustainable bioenergy future might look like, highlighting successful biomass businesses that are producing energy for schools, colleges, hospitals, and prisons using native grasses, wood waste, and even forest debris from Hurricane Rita.

The transition from first-generation biofuels to more sustainable plant-based energy sources will only happen, according to the report, by enacting federal policies that:

- Remove subsidies for inefficient bioenergy practices that place new, more efficient and sustainable practices at an economic disadvantage;
- Establish standards that ensure that bioenergy sources do not contribute to environmental degradation and exacerbate global warming; and,
- Establish incentives that reward practices that most effectively combat global warming in a sustainable manner.

"Growing a Green Energy Future: A primer and Vision for Sustainable Biomass Energy" recommends federal policies that ensure bioenergy strategies help address global warming; maintain economic vitality; protect native habitats and biodiversity; assure sustainable harvests; prevent crops from becoming invasive; preserve water resources; protect water quality and uphold soil quality.

"People, communities, farmers, businesses and wildlife will all benefit from our transition to a clean energy economy supported by sustainable plant-based energy sources," said Sibbing. "We have solutions. It is time to use them."

National Wildlife Federation is America's conservation organization inspiring Americans to protect wildlife for our children's future.

For more information: www.nwf.org/news

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