

Biofuels benefit billionaires, study finds

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Biofuels will serve the interests of large industrial groups rather than helping to cut carbon emissions and ward off climate change, according to research to be published in the *International Journal of Environment and Health* this month.

Simone Vieri of the University "La Sapienza" of Rome, Italy, explains that, in its policies to combat [climate change](#), the European Union has planned to increase to 10% the share of fuel derived from biofuels on the market by 2020. It has focused attention on first-generation biofuels, made from the conversion of [plant material](#) which can be grown specifically for [fuel production](#), such as corn, soy, [sugarcane](#) or [palm oil](#). It has given only a secondary role to second-generation biofuels, made from agricultural and woody crop biomass, including waste and by-products.

Vieri suggests that, "In 2020 the EU won't be able to keep to its 10% biofuels goal using only European agricultural production, but will have to continue importing the greatest part of raw materials, or biofuels." In this frame, Vieri explains that, "The EU's decision to focus on the first-generation biofuels, raises many doubts." In particular, the approach seems to favour several issues. For instance, it favours production systems that are in competition with traditional agriculture for use of resources and production factors, he says. Additionally, to encourage agro-industrial models, such as those on which the production of first generation biofuels is based, might compromise the possibility of developing models based on multifunctional agriculture and, then, on the production of energy from agriculture waste and by-products rather than

from dedicated products.

The adoption of first-generation biofuels sometimes leads to exploitation of human and [environmental resources](#) of poorer countries, adds Vieri, as they are commonly the source of many of the agricultural raw materials used for production of biofuels. Moreover, [agricultural production](#) processes that change land use can lead to zero net benefit in terms of emissions reduction.

Other problems that arise when reliance is placed on first-generation biofuels lie with the economics. Financial market speculation strengthens the link between the price of oil and the price of the main agricultural raw materials, Vieri says. Furthermore, an increase, or instability of agricultural products' prices, weighs heavily on poorer nations and their food security.

In this context "the choice to promote first generation biofuels is an example of how politics places the protection of the interests and profit strategies of a restricted number of subjects before the costs and benefits to be had on a wider scale", adds Vieri.

Vieri adds that the "green economy" model might break new ground if it were to prove able to facilitate reduced emissions and allow economic growth and development with direct benefit to society itself rather than the profits of multinationals.

More information: "Biofuels and EU's choices" in *Int. J. Environment and Health*, 2012, 6, 155-169.

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