

## Latest News

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Ethanol

## Supporting Biofuels

### President Obama wants U.S. leadership; EPA works on life-cycle analysis

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**THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION** has launched a federal program to support U.S. biofuels R&D and commercialization, part of which is already raising concerns.

"If we are to be the leader in the 21st-century global economy, then we must lead the world in clean energy technology," President Barack Obama said when announcing the new biofuels program last week. The program creates an interagency working group that will coordinate government agencies involved in biofuels R&D, market development, production, and transportation. It also provides nearly \$800 million to speed up advanced biofuels R&D and to spur commercial-scale biorefinery demonstration projects.

A controversial part of the program, however, is an [EPA](#) draft [proposal](#) that lays out a strategy, required under a 2007 energy law, to produce 36 billion gal of biofuels by 2022. The law sets targets of 15 billion gal of conventional ethanol, 16 billion gal of cellulosic ethanol, and 5 billion gal of advanced biofuels and biodiesel. According to the law, a biofuel must achieve at least a 20% reduction of the greenhouse gas emissions that would have resulted from use of petroleum-based fuel, as determined by life-cycle analyses. Similarly, biodiesel or advanced biofuels must achieve a 50% reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, and cellulosic biofuels, a 60% reduction.

The law's requirement of a life-cycle analysis of biofuels reflects a growing concern that ethanol may result in higher CO<sub>2</sub> emissions due to land-use practices, such as clearing rain forest to grow energy crops.

Indeed, EPA's proposed method for conducting life-cycle analyses has found that CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from conventional ethanol production fall short of the 20% threshold in some instances, such as when coal or natural gas is used to power a biofinery. Legislators from farm states and the ethanol industry say that EPA's proposal is inaccurate and that they do not support it.

In a briefing last week, EPA Administrator Lisa P. Jackson said the proposal lays out pathways to reduce the carbon footprint for different biofuels. She also noted that 15 billion gal of ethanol are exempt from the biofuel definition. The agency will accept comments over the next 60 days.

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*An EPA life-cycle analysis has found that using corn to make ethanol may not reduce greenhouse gas emissions.*