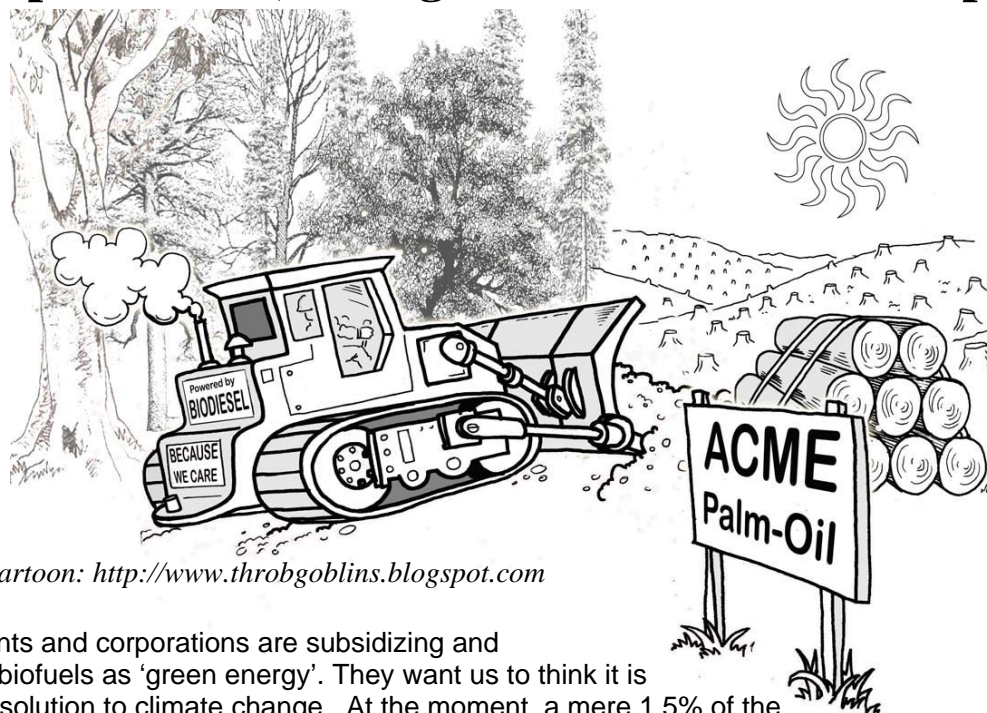


Monocultures for biofuels: Stop a climate, ecological and social catastrophe!



Source of cartoon: <http://www.throbgoblins.blogspot.com>

Governments and corporations are subsidizing and promoting biofuels as 'green energy'. They want us to think it is part of the solution to climate change. At the moment, a mere 1.5% of the world's transport fuels come from agrofuels, but already millions of hectares of rainforest and other biodiversity hotspots are being destroyed. Farmland on which rural communities depend for their food is being transformed into monoculture plantations. Agrofuel policies support a new corporate alliance which includes big agri-business, oil companies, the biotech industry, car manufacturers and venture capitalists.

What are biofuels doing to the climate?

Turning more land into monocultures for agrofuels is one of the quickest ways to heat the planet.

Industrial agriculture demands high fossil fuels inputs. Monocultures are the main driver of deforestation and other ecosystem destruction. On top of this, large amounts of carbon are released from the soil. This includes peatlands, which are drained to make way for agrofuels. In fact, global emissions from destroying peatlands are even greater than those from deforestation.

Every acre of land put into agrofuel production means, if food production is to remain the same, that an acre of land must be cleared of natural vegetation (natural ecosystems hold billions of tonnes of carbon). Climate change is made worse not just because of the carbon emissions: biodiverse ecosystems are also essential for regulating the global climate and this includes regulating rainfall and storm patterns on which global food production depends.

Even agrofuels produced in the UK are anything but climate-friendly. The total emissions linked to rapeseed biodiesel are up to 70% higher than those from ordinary diesel, because of the large amounts of nitrate fertilisers involved. At the same time, using rapeseed oil for cars means that the gap in the food and cosmetics markets is now being filled by palm oil with the same impact as using palm oil for biodiesel directly.

Cutting down rainforests doesn't just add carbon to the atmosphere in the same way as burning coal or oil does: Many rainforests and other ecosystems have a 'tipping point'. This means we can degrade them so far and then they could collapse suddenly and completely – including the Amazon, which could be pushed into a cycle of mega-fires and desertification.

Fuelling hunger

“The grain required to fill a 25-gallon SUV gas tank with ethanol will feed one person for a year.” (Lester Brown, Director of the Earth Policy Institute).

Global food prices have risen by 75% on average in the past year and UN officials have warned that 100 million more people’s lives are at risk. Even in the UK, poorer people are struggling ever more to afford a healthy diet. Agrofuels are one of the main driver of this. Tens of millions of hectares of land are being turned into agrofuel plantations, and productive, sustainable farming systems are being destroyed. Farmland which is not yet controlled by agribusiness is classed as ‘marginal’ or ‘degraded’ and earmarked for agrofuels. In India, for example, there are plans to turn 13 million hectares of so-called ‘marginal land’ into jatropha plantations for biodiesel. Yet millions of people depend on this land for their livelihoods and food.

Destroying people’s livelihoods

Agrofuels mean large-scale displacement of communities, often involving violent evictions. The Chair of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues estimates that 60 million indigenous people are likely to become ‘biofuel refugees’ (about the same as the UK population). Small farmers, pastoralists and other communities are losing their land or are forced to grow crops for agrofuels instead of growing food. Agro-chemicals, including pesticide spraying poison people, soil and water. Industrial agrofuels worsen soil erosion and desertification as well as freshwater depletion – destroying tomorrow’s livelihoods, too.

Voices from the global South

“The only goal [of agrofuels] is to maintain current patterns of consumption in the First World and high rates of profit for multinational corporations.” (MST, the Brazilian Landless Workers’ Movement)

“We demand a worldwide moratorium on agro-fuels monocultures and the international trade in agro-fuels, including the trade in carbon credits. We need a moratorium to evaluate the potential impact and the dangers of this market. We denounce that we are victims of the adverse impacts of industrialized monocultures.” (Farmers’ organizations and NGOs in Paraguay)

“It is a push by industry to make another scramble for Africa, grab the land and continue with business as usual. The industrial bio-energy push to do increased bio-energy demand will be nothing other than an effort at extending the frontiers of neo-colonialism in its continued march on the back of the fabled market forces” (Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth Nigeria)

What about ‘sustainable biofuels’?

We can get a very small amount of energy from waste-vegetable oil, biogas from landfill or manure – and that’s something to be supported. But it’s not enough to reduce our carbon emissions by much. Companies and governments speak about certifying ‘sustainable’ soya, palm oil and other agrofuels. The first ‘sustainable palm oil’ is about to be certified – what this means is that a company can use and old plantation, for which they cut down rainforest in the past for ‘certified sustainable’ biofuels and meantime cut down another forest for a new plantation for the uncertified market. Certification is a dangerous greenwash and will not save a single tree, nor prevent a single eviction.

What you can do

- Sign up to regular email action alerts and campaigns: Email info@biofuelwatch.org.uk or sign up via the website.
- Contact Biofuelwatch if you would like to get involved in the campaign – we are all volunteers and welcome any help people can give!
- Campaign locally against agrofuels from large-scale monocultures. Contact us for ideas.
- Support a call for an immediate EU Agrofuel moratorium: <http://www.econexus.info/biofuels.html>