

WORC

Western Organization of Resource Councils

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The Western Organization of Resource Councils (WORC) is a network of grassroots organizations from seven states (Colorado, Idaho, Montana, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Wyoming,) that include 10,000 members and 45 local community groups. WORC members are farmers, ranchers, and consumers. We welcome this opportunity to submit comments on the proposed rule "Regulation of Fuels and Fuel Additives: Changes to Renewable Fuel Standard Program," otherwise referred to as RFS2.

WORC actively advocates on energy policy and on renewable fuels, based on over thirty years of commitment to principles of conservation and sustainability and strong robust rural economies sustained by family-owned farms and ranches. WORC believes that the development of renewable liquid fuels from biomass, if done carefully, can play an important part in helping establish energy independence and lower atmospheric carbon. WORC has consistently advocated for holding renewable fuels to a rigorous accounting for life-cycle greenhouse gas emissions, which Congress incorporated into the Energy Security and Independence Act of 2007. WORC also supported language to include the consideration of indirect land use changes in accounting for the carbon footprint of renewable fuels.

WORC continues to support lifecycle accounting for greenhouse gases from all fuels, including renewable fuels and the development of transparent and credible methods to calculate the carbon costs of indirect land use changes due to biofuel. Accordingly, we support these rules, but only if significant changes to account for indirect land use changes are made as outlined below.

The Department of Energy, Argonne National Laboratories, National Renewable Energy Labs, and many other reputable laboratories and scientists have conducted extensive studies to account for the greenhouse gas emissions for different types of renewable fuels. Much of this work has been extensively peer reviewed and can measure emissions with a reasonable level of reliability and transparency.

WORC believes that more can be done to identify even greater reductions in the carbon footprint of biodiesel for agricultural end uses by exploring different feedstocks, production scale, and distribution of biofuels. For example, small micro-processed biodiesel that uses oilseed crops grown in rotation with small grains in the Northern Great Plains, that utilizes expeller-pressed meal to supplement primarily grassfed livestock, and that uses both the fuel and the feed on site or locally, offers significant benefits in the lifecycle carbon footprint. EPA, in being attentive to the carbon footprints of different renewable fuels should audit its own rules that set forth prohibitive barriers to this scale of production, despite its highly sustainable and ecologically valuable features. (NOTE: Very small processors must incur prohibitively exorbitant expense to establish that already certified CAA-compliant fuels do comply with the Clean Air Act, when periodic tests verifying the fuel meets an ASTM standard should suffice.)

Although WORC supports the concept of accounting for indirect land use changes in measuring the carbon content of the fuel, WORC has concerns with EPA's proposals for measuring

indirect land use changes due to biofuels. We believe that this is an area in which EPA will need to do more work in order to establish a meaningful rule that can be widely accepted, and that is transparent and defensible to a broad group of stakeholders, in particular the emerging advanced renewable fuels industry.

The following problems need to be addressed so that indirect land use changes can be reasonably and fairly calculated.

The modeling should compare apples to apples when it comes to indirect land use impacts of different liquid fuels. The fuels that the RFS2 are bringing into the mix of U.S. energy supplies are in direct competition with a variety of unconventional fuels that carry a much higher carbon cost and direct and indirect land use impacts than those modeled in the proposed rule. Failing to account for the greenhouse gas and direct and indirect land use effects from conventional and unconventional fossil fuels extraction and development in this process will distort the true balance of greenhouse gas emissions and tilt public policies toward high carbon fossil fuels and away from cleaner advanced renewable fuels.

1. With Canadian tar sands pipelines crossing WORC members in several states, WORC is acutely aware of the high carbon costs and net energy losses involved with tar sands. There is a significant carbon footprint and land use impact from stripping the boreal northern forests of Canada to surface mine crude bitumen. In addition, enormous quantities of energy are necessary to refine, heat and pump the product in massive pipelines to southern U.S. refineries and markets. The pipelines stretching across thousands of miles of farm and ranch lands should be considered as well.
2. Similarly, WORC members also reside in Northwest Colorado where oil shale developments would require huge amounts of energy, despoil enormous tracts of land, and consume vast quantities of water in an arid environment. The energy requirements for removing and processing the oil shale will be enormous as well.
3. WORC members also live and work over coal seams that could be strip mined and refined into liquid fuels, again at enormous costs in land, water and net energy inputs. Much discussion of coal liquefaction presumes a viable technique for carbon capture and sequestration, an emerging and untested technology; but one which assuredly will require significant energy to bring into effect, and which has implications for land use and impacts off-site, including pipelines and drilling, jeopardizing precious groundwater sources.
4. More conventional oil and gas developments are also incurring significant wide scale land use impacts across the Western U.S., including the salinization of the Tongue and Powder River basins from coal bed methane developments and the impacts of increasing use of hydraulic fracturing to extract natural gas on surface and groundwater across Wyoming, North Dakota, Colorado, New Mexico, and Montana

The modeling should fully and accurately account for the energy value of animal feed byproducts of renewable fuels. Critics have raised the question of whether the California Air Resource Board low carbon fuel standard and the EPA have sufficiently incorporated into their carbon and indirect land use calculations the retention of much of the nutritional value of some biomass feedstocks. If this is not taken into account, it will significantly distort the indirect land use assumptions in the proposed modeling.

The rule may have the unintended effect of undermining advanced biofuels with more beneficial ecological footprints. Since much of the conventional corn ethanol RFS is already grandfathered into the Act without a full life-cycle accounting for greenhouse gases, the proposed rule could have the unintended consequence of jeopardizing newer, more environmentally benign technologies utilizing feedstocks such as perennial grasses that can be grown on marginal lands with minimal inputs.

The ILUC model needs to adequately measure and account for other significant variables affecting global land use change, and somehow realistically balance the relative importance of the RFS2 goals in effecting those changes. The volatile commodities market of 2008 is instructive.

As basic food commodities skyrocketed agro-fuels were widely considered to be the driving factor. In retrospect, other variables eclipsed the relative influence of agro-fuels: Increased meat and grain diets in burgeoning Asian economies like China; loss of food security in developing economies due to globalization and trade policies that prompted hoarding of foodstuffs and skyrocketing prices; and deregulated commodities markets resulting in rampant speculation that drove up prices.

Conversion of land to agro-fuels crops outside the borders of the U.S. is an issue that needs to be dealt with forcefully and directly. The obvious approach is by not permitting imports of ethanol and biodiesel. Such a policy makes sense in light of the need for energy independence as a driving impetus for the EISA and the RFS. WORC has supported and continues to support Congressional steps to prevent imports of agro-fuels.

WORC strongly supports lifecycle greenhouse gases accounting in qualifying renewable fuels for the RFS2. It is important to formulate accurate assessments for the indirect land use changes that might accrue from the use of lands for biofuels production.

Respectfully submitted,

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