

Eco-Res Forum – Exploring the Ethical, Political and Socio-Cultural Aspects of Climate Change
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John Cairns' Posting # 5
WE CAN NEVER DO MERELY ONE THING!
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Garrett Hardin's famous statement ("We can never do merely one thing!") has been confirmed over and over again. The latest verification is from the ethanol "solution." Ethanol from corn was to be what would enable the United States to continue its love affair with the automobile. However, the following research surfaced.

1. More energy is needed to produce a gallon of ethanol than it contains (the input/output ratio is not favorable).
2. Converting corn to fuel has raised the price of corn, thus raising the price of tortillas for poor people in Mexico, etc.
3. Agricultural land that has been allowed to go fallow will be planted with corn due to the rising prices. The fallow land may have been useful to wildlife and was highly probably a better habitat for wildlife than a cultivated field.
4. The possibility that the cheap energy "party" could continue undoubtedly delayed efforts to increase public transportation use and decrease use of energy per capita.
5. Finally, a new study by Stanford University atmospheric scientist Mark Z. Jacobson (published in *Environmental Science and Technology*) indicates that, if every vehicle in the United States ran on fuel made primarily from ethanol, the number of respiratory-related deaths and hospitalizations likely would increase. Before the commitment becomes greater to ethanol as an automotive fuel, further research is needed on exploring its effects and the ramifications of choosing this source of energy. Inhaling ozone, even at low levels, can decrease lung capacity, inflame lung tissue, worsen asthma, and impair the body's immune system according to the US Environmental Protection Agency. The World Health Organization estimates that 800,000 people die each year from ozone and other chemicals in smog.

Tunnel vision (doing just one thing) is simply not compatible with ecocentricity, but the latter is a rare human perspective. In this illustrative example of ethanol use, the lack of awareness of the connections between the component crucial factors is stunning. How are one get successfully beyond the comparatively uncomplicated situation just discussed to the really complex ecocentricity issues?