

## Little Prairie Farmer Says No To Corn Ethanol

I have lived and farmed in Little Prairie all my life. Little Prairie, of course, is a farming community about half way between Northfield and Faribault. Although I raise corn, I am opposed to the huge ethanol plant that has been proposed for our neighborhood by the company Advanced BioEnergy (ABE).

I would like us to examine if corn ethanol is what it claims to be and if it is worth the incredible stress it is causing our community.

Some would have you believe corn ethanol is the “green” alternative to oil. Emissions of greenhouse gases are about 12% less from ethanol than gasoline **at the tailpipe**, however that figure is for corn in normal production. The ethanol plants coming on line next year alone are going to require a bumper crop of 11% more acres and the next year much more yet. Acres grown just to feed ethanol plants. The nitrous oxides and carbon released in raising corn actually makes ethanol a worse polluter than gasoline. Corn ethanol isn’t the solution, or even a part of the solution, but a distracton from getting on with effective and sustainable solutions.

A meeting was held at the Little Prairie church on November 4, which was attended by at least 200 people, mostly residents or friends of our neighborhood. ABE gave their presentation. A panel representing environmental groups, the Univ. of MN, and local farmers questioned the value of corn ethanol.

Dr. Jason Hill, U. of M., shared the research findings that if all the available cropland in the U.S. were put into corn and made into ethanol it would meet only 12% of our motoring fuel needs of which only 2.5% would be “new energy” after subtracting the fossil fuel used to make it! All panelists looked to the future of ethanol from biomass such as prairie grasses as having a much greater return and far fewer environmental negatives. I would like to add, the average American car gets 21 miles per gallon, (about the same as the Model T), so one more mile per gallon would save twice as much fuel as all the new energy gained putting all our land into corn for ethanol.

I contacted professors of agricultural economics, Chris Hurt at Purdue and Vern Eidman at the U. of M.. Both agreed with Dr. Hill and said this is not only bad for our environment, (the increasing Dead Zone in the Gulf, added soil erosion, etc.) but has negative consequences to our livestock farmers and food supply. Chris said the corn ethanol industry is simply not sustainable and with the subsidies involved, an extremely expensive way to get a very questionable benefit. Vern talked of how we will soon be importing much of our meat from other countries. The richest farmland in the world and we will import meat so we can feed our corn to our gas guzzling cars?! Meanwhile the rest of the world will sorely miss our exports.

This facility would produce 100 million gallons of ethanol per year and absolutely dominate our neighborhood. Make no mistake, a plant of this size is heavy industry.

Anybody who's been around ethanol will tell you, it smells. ABE tells us they don't smell anymore but we toured the Atwater plant and found out otherwise. Even the farmer who sold the land for the plant told us, "I won't lie to you, sometimes when the air is heavy it can get pretty strong".

There's the constant noise of the hammermill and the sky will be lit all night. The traffic will be amazing. Our local cooperative at their busiest brings in about 75,000 bushels a day for just a few days. This place will bring in an average of twice that every day! It works out to an average of one semi going in or out every two minutes, all day, every day. In addition, there will be three to six sets of railroad tracks looping round and round the 300 acres of property. Miles of train cars sitting around what are now beautiful wetlands.

Many of the families in our neighborhood say they will leave if it's built, but who will buy their places and for how much less than they're worth today? Most of these families are longtime residents, who have worked hard to stay in this neighborhood where their parents and grandparents raised them.

Little Prairie is overwhelmingly against this project. At the Nov. 4<sup>th</sup> meeting the large crowd was asked for a show of hands for who was in favor and only one hand was raised. When asked who opposed, most all of the hands went up.

Our community is being asked to give too much for a plan so disruptive, with such a negative impact on property values, little effect on energy needs, and whose long term success is dubious. This industry is so overbuilt already that this year's crop, (the third largest ever), is projected to be short of this year's needs. With lots of plants expanding and 55 new plants coming online just next year, the price of corn from now on may make corn ethanol no longer profitable.

My wife and I just attended a forum on ethanol featuring over a dozen experts on the subject. The focus was undoubtedly on moving on from corn ethanol to cellulosic ethanol. As MN Secretary of Agriculture, Gene Hugoson put it, corn ethanol was "bridge" technology. He said a lot of horse traders went broke when the tractor came along and corn ethanol was the horse and cellulosic will be the tractor. Let's not buy the last horse!

Here in Bridgewater Township, our supervisors, Gary Ebling, Leif Knecht, and Kathleen Doran-Norton, are studying whether to assume planning and zoning. Even as they look at this, all have been conflicted over whether or not to permit this huge industry here in Little Prairie. Please contact our supervisors to let them know this plant is a big mistake.