

Title: Is Bio-methanol production and use an answer to improving rural livelihoods in America?

Kristiina Vogt (Co-coordinator Forest Systems and Bioenergy, University of Washington and Vice-President for Bioenergy, Interforest LLC), Daniel Vogt (University of Washington), John Friederichs (Conservation Director, PUD Ferry County, Washington), Ravi Upadhye (Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, California), Patricia Roads (science writer, Ohio), Robert Edmonds (University of Washington), Rod Fleck (city attorney and planner, Forks, Washington), Cal Mukumoto (Interforest LLC), John Gordon (Chairman, Interforest LLC),

When two or more people get together and discuss living conditions in America they generally cover three topics:

- 1) The cost of gasoline
- 2) The lack of economic opportunities
- 3) The weather and global warming.

Many rural communities in America are so economically stressed that individuals living there may not get beyond the discussion of the first two items on the list. Everyone recognizes and accepts the fact that there is a need to provide some economic opportunity and relief for many areas in America, but few viable projects have been introduced or implemented to alleviate these problems. One alternative being considered is to use biomass to create biofuels which could address the first two concerns and may help in addressing the latter as well.

One type of biofuel would be methanol produced from biomass. Using methanol created from biomass would lower the cost of fuel oil and could eliminate some of our dependence on foreign countries for oil. One additional advantage to using bio-methanol is the fact that unlike fossil fuels it does not add additional carbon dioxide to the atmosphere. This will help reduce pollution and perhaps eliminate some of the health problems attributed to it, and contribute a small step forward in reducing our emissions.

Previously there has been conflict between resource use and resource conservation. This can be illustrated by looking at the conflicts that occurred between logging communities and environmental groups in the Pacific Northwest starting in the 1970's. Sustainable economic opportunities will not be generated if we simply rely on the traditional method of cutting ever greater amounts of timber to solve the problem. By converting existing wood-based waste streams into methanol and other biochemical components, new economic opportunities could be realized from the traditional economic base of rural communities. In addition using biomass to create methanol could provide more reliable long-term livelihoods for individuals in rural communities in a sustainable fashion.

To meet the three primary concerns of rural communities - - cost of fuel, lack of economic opportunities and the weather - - will require the adoption of current technologies that are available today in the energy sector. The technologies converting biomass to biofuels are designed to be environmentally friendly. The use of methanol as a biofuel in automobiles is not only environmentally friendly, but this approach could even create jobs for Americans. The only group that loses anything with the extensive use of biomass conversion to biofuel will be the foreign-oil interests. Do we care?