

OPIS: WITNESS WARNS AGAINST BEING OVERLY CAUTIOUS ON BIOFUELS

An Iowa cattle farmer and past president of the Iowa Renewable Fuels Association (IRFA) warned lawmakers during a Senate Agriculture Committee field hearing yesterday not to be too overly cautious when it comes to biofuels expansion, which could come at the expense of the industry.

“Quite frankly, we believe some of the decisions made in the next six months will set the tone for agriculture and biofuels for the next decade -- and we are nervous,” Bill Couser of Couser Cattle Company explained to the Senate Agriculture Committee field hearing in Sioux City, Iowa, on the expanded role of biofuels in America.

“Whether it's indirect land use change in the renewable fuels standard [proposed] rule, the debate over E15 or conflicting views of how cellulosic feedstocks will change our landscape, those of us living and breathing this industry day in and day out feel that some in Washington, D.C. are prisoners of old ‘data sets’ that fail to grasp the rapid evolution of farming and biofuels production, and that others hide behind unproven scientific ‘theories’ to push what is really an anti-agriculture agenda,” Couser continued.

Couser, who is the past president of IRFA and serves on the board of the 50- million gal/yr Lincoln Energy ethanol plant in Nevada, Iowa, farms roughly 5,000 acres, raises seed corn for Monsanto and feeds out 4,000-5,000 head of cattle.

“We hear about being ‘cautious’ toward expanding the production and use of biofuels because we don't want any unintended consequences,” Couser continued. “That's fair to a point. But what we see in Washington, D.C. today is ‘over caution’ -- not supported by sound science or the latest data -- that leads to the very unintended consequences biofuels opponents claim they want to avoid. For example, the EPA is using flawed models and inaccurate data to conclude that biofuels production here leads to the burning down of the rainforest in Brazil. The corresponding rules and regulations stemming from this conclusion would create high barriers to the growth of renewable fuels production in the U.S.,” he explained.

“However, better models and the data have shown this indirect land use change theory to be unsupported,” Couser noted. “Therefore, the ‘caution’ of the EPA will reduce the amount of low carbon ethanol replacing gasoline produced from tar sands, resulting in more carbon in the atmosphere, not less. As a proponent of the farmer's ability to both feed and fuel the world, this type of policymaking is frustrating to say the least,” he added.

“The next six months in D.C. may very well determine my livelihood for the next ten years -- and I am nervous,” Couser concluded. “I urge you to work with regulators to prevent ‘over caution’ from unnecessarily restraining the role biofuels can play in not just reducing carbon emissions, but also in creating green collar jobs, reducing our dependence on foreign oil and boosting farm opportunities,” he added.

The field hearing, which was hosted by Committee Chairman Tom Harkin (D- Iowa), and John Thune (R-S.D.), also heard testimony from KL Energy Corp., Cedar Falls Utilities, Ceres, the University of Minnesota's Institute on the Environment and POET.