

Abstract

Stakeholder Views and Concerns about Bioenergy: Organizational Focus, Driver Issues and Uncertainty

Elizabeth Peelle
Oak Ridge National Laboratory
Oak Ridge, Tennessee 37831-6200

Extended discussions with both environmental and producer stakeholders in 1999 and 2000 are reviewed in terms of organizational focus, driver issues and three major uncertainties affecting future bioenergy fuel cycles.

Despite the several environmental benefits expected of bioenergy, only about half of (organized) environmental stakeholders were supportive of bioenergy. Their views and concerns were strongly related to both positive and negative driver issues, with major issues in rank order being sustainable agriculture and forestry, sustainable energy systems, biodiversity, and suitability of conversion technologies. Those groups which saw global warming as a key problem tended to be favorable toward development of bioenergy. Others concerned about logging in national forests, environmental impacts on soil, air and water, or cleaning up polluting coal-fired generating plants, tended to be more skeptical or to reserve judgment on the acceptability of bioenergy.

As concern about genetically modified organisms (GMOs) has spread, it has been taken up by some environmental organizations, becoming a negative driver issue that encourages withdrawal from and skepticism/opposition toward bioenergy. Meanwhile, genetically modified seeds were the majority choice of U.S. farmers for corn and soybeans planted in 1999. GMO concerns have also widened the distance on bioenergy issues between some environmental organizations and various producer organizations and increased skepticism about bioenergy.

Thus GMOs and the biotechnology of altering plant genes have joined two other major sources of uncertainties about prospects for viable bioenergy fuel cycles: global warming and effects of greenhouse gases on global climate, and the vagueness and uncertainty of the mostly hypothetical bioenergy fuel cycle.