

December 5, 2011

The Honorable Barbara Boxer  
Chair  
Committee on Environment and Public Works  
U.S. Senate

The Honorable James Inhofe  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Environment and Public Works  
U.S. Senate

Dear Chair Boxer and Ranking Member Inhofe:

A recent letter to you from several anti-biofuel organizations grossly misrepresented and distorted the findings of recent studies by the National Academies of Sciences (NAS) and United Nations Committee on Food Security (CFS).<sup>1</sup> We are writing to address the letter's obvious mischaracterizations of these two studies, particularly as they relate the Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS).

Judging by their erroneous description of the studies' key conclusions, it seems the authors of the November 30<sup>th</sup> letter likely did not even read the studies to which they refer. While the November 30<sup>th</sup> letter suggests the NAS report offers definitive conclusions about the environmental impacts of biofuels, the co-chairs of the panel distinctly emphasize in the study's preface that "...our clearest conclusion is that there is very high uncertainty in the impacts we were trying to estimate. The uncertainties include essentially all of the drivers of biofuel production and consumption and the complex interactions among those drivers: future crude oil prices, feedstock costs and availability, technological advances in conversion efficiencies, land-use change, government policy, and more." Further, the November 30<sup>th</sup> anti-biofuels letter conveniently omitted the NAS report's finding that "...using biofuels holds potential to provide net environmental benefits compared to using petroleum-based fuels..."

Nothing in the NAS study conclusively states that the RFS "is likely...exacerbating global warming," as the November 30<sup>th</sup> letter suggests. Rather, the panel found that, "We do not have generally agreed upon estimates of the environmental or GHG impacts of most biofuels." In fact, one of the co-chairs of the NAS panel, along with authors at the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), recently published a paper finding that "...we estimate that U.S. corn ethanol at present, on average, results in a life-cycle reduction in GHG emissions of 24 percent (including land use change emissions) relative to the emissions associated with gasoline..." and "...cellulosic ethanol achieves overwhelming GHG reductions."<sup>2</sup> In general, the NAS report was admittedly inconclusive, especially because the report did not compare the possible environmental and economic impacts of biofuels to the impacts of the

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<sup>1</sup> Letter signed by ActionAid USA et al. Nov. 30, 2011

<sup>2</sup> M. Wang, J. Han, Z. Haq, W.E. Tyner, M. Wu, A. Elgowainy. Energy and greenhouse gas emission effects of corn and cellulosic ethanol with technology improvements and land use changes, *Biomass and Bioenergy*, Volume 35, Issue 5, May 2011, Pages 1885-1896, ISSN 0961-9534, 10.1016/j.biombioe.2011.01.028.

transportation fuels they replace (i.e., gasoline and diesel fuel). The co-chairs acknowledged the limitations of the report when they wrote, “The bottom line is that it simply was not possible to come up with clear quantitative answers to many of the questions.”

In addition, we note that some of the NAS study panelists *themselves* have questioned the usefulness and balance of the study’s findings. For example, it has been reported by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (publishers of the journal *Science*) that Dr. Virginia Dale, an ecologist at the DOE’s Oak Ridge National Laboratory, believes the NAS report “is not based on the most current information” and could be “misleading if the assumptions of the analysis are not considered.”<sup>3</sup> Dr. Dale encouraged readers to “read the details with care,” an admonition the authors of the November 30<sup>th</sup> letter clearly ignored.

The November 30<sup>th</sup> letter also references a recent report by the U.N. CFS as another study that puts the RFS “under scrutiny.” In fact, the brief CFS report, which simply summarizes recent discussions by the committee’s expert panel on food security and nutrition, doesn’t even mention the RFS a single time. Moreover, in regard to biofuels, the report recommends only that the expert panel should consider a review process that considers both the positive and potentially undesirable impacts of biofuel policies around the world. Much more of the report is focused on constructive recommendations to address food security concerns, including reducing food waste and post-harvest losses, “tightening up” speculation on the futures market to “avoid price manipulations,” revisiting international trade rules, increasing investment in agriculture technology and research, and other actions that impact global food security.

In closing, we urge you to ignore the November 30<sup>th</sup> letter’s blatant misrepresentations of these recent studies. The groups clearly twisted the findings of these studies in an attempt to support their request for hearings on the RFS. And, should your Committee decide that hearings are indeed warranted, we ask that your witness lists be fairly balanced to include representatives from the biofuels industry, and academics such as Dr. Dale who understand the enormous promise of biofuels.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bob Dinneen". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Bob Dinneen  
President & CEO

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<sup>3</sup> See <http://news.sciencemag.org/scienceinsider/2011/10/panel-doubts-us-biofuels-goals.html>