

# Green With Envy: Food prices highlight need for alternative energy

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Beer is being threatened by climate change. Yes, that cool, refreshing and frothy beverage that makes beer pong, flip cup, kings and quarters possible could suffer if malting barley, a key ingredient to beer, begins to feel the pangs of climate change, a climate scientist in New Zealand said. A decrease in the amount of barley yielded would lead to a decrease in the amount of beer being produced, likely increasing the cost to consumers.

While rising beer prices could be on the horizon, rising food prices are a reality. Some here at OU might argue whether or not beer is a staple food, but in a global context, wheat, corn and other grains that provide the basis for the diets of humans and livestock are getting more expensive.

Of course, people are looking for one thing to blame on the increasing food prices — most notably, the skyrocketing trend of growing corn to produce the biofuel ethanol. To produce corn-based ethanol, corn is ground up, converted into the simple sugar dextrose and then fermented. The ethanol industry is taking the heat and refuting that it is to blame for the increasing food prices.

Corn-based ethanol has its part in the increase of food prices, but it most definitely is not the sole reason for the increase. The United States dominated corn exports in 2007, exporting about four times as much corn as Argentina, the country with the second-highest amount of corn exports, according to the Earth Policy Institute.

It's no secret that the United States immediately jumped on the corn bandwagon, and farmers turned their attention to corn as a crop that would be lucrative when ethanol proved to be the renewable fuel of the future. Unfortunately, corn-based ethanol is not the answer to our energy-saving prayers, as producing it creates a net energy loss.

Ironically enough, heavy machinery is needed to maintain huge fields of corn, and that machinery is powered by the same fossil fuels ethanol is aiming to replace, creating a counter-productive increase in demand for oil.

But ethanol cannot be the lone scapegoat, because an increase in oil consumption is increasing the price of oil. While we are used to inhaling about one-fourth of the world's oil exports, competition is on the horizon. Countries like China and India are growing in population at a staggering rate, with more mouths to feed and an increasing industry to do so.

An increase in oil affects the price of food because maintaining land and transporting crops uses fossil fuels. In the United States, about two-thirds of oil used goes toward the transportation sector, but about 25 percent of that goes toward transportation that isn't the cars we drive domestically to get around town, according to the Energy Information Administration. If it costs more to produce a product, naturally the producer is going to increase the price of it when it is sold in order to make a profit.

The rise in food prices is a complex phenomenon, with a few possibilities involving energy to curb the effects. Corn-based ethanol needs to be dropped as the government's net project for renewable energy. Scientists need funding to work with solar, wind and

needs to be dropped as the government's pet project for renewable energy. Scientists need funding to work with solar, wind and other renewable energy possibilities, and diverting funds from corn growth could offer some much-needed finances.

Secondly, buying locally continues to be a great solution to cutting transportation and machinery costs while supporting the local economy. Cutting down our oil consumption would benefit our economy in multiple ways, and rising food prices are just another symptom of our dependence on it.

The world is set in a global economy, and population growth across the world can influence the price of bread at Kroger. While there are other factors that also go into the rising food prices, such as droughts in Australia destroying its wheat crop or the need to feed livestock the same grains that are increasing in price, reducing consumption continues to be a solution that is foolproof.

So whether you chose to blame corn, climate or the cattle for grocery bills being higher, the fact is that replacing fuel is not as efficient as using less. The global economy is one where everything is interconnected, so the logic isn't  $a + b = c$  as much as it is  $a + b = c$ ,  $d + e + f = c$ ,  $b + e = c$ , etc. The outcome is the same, but a lot of different events occurred together to make it that way.

We felt the burden in energy bills, then we felt the burden at the gas pump and now we're feeling the burden at the grocery store. Energy consumption has an unfortunate rippling effect which, if climate change continues, could eventually make you feel a burden at the bar. Then this town will really be having a crisis.

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