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Time to reconsider criticism of ethanol

In the past, the ethanol industry has been blamed for high food prices and environmental damage.

Last month, the EPA along with several major universities corrected those misconceptions, stating that ethanol is not the root cause for higher grocery prices. In fact, corn prices have recently fallen sharply despite increased ethanol production.

While we know ethanol is not the only answer to long-term energy independence, it is helping lower gasoline prices today. Consumers need to know the truth that oil importers refuse to tell: ethanol is a great deal for our country. Ethanol, in addition to domestically produced oil, is reducing the \$1 billion-plus that leave our country every day to pay for a consumable product.

Both ethanol and gasoline are consumable products; however, with ethanol we retain the dollars to do it again.

Merrill Lynch estimates that removing biofuels from the market would result in gasoline prices 15 percent higher than they are today. Based on that analysis, with oil at \$110 a barrel and U.S. demand estimated at 9 million barrels a day, ethanol is saving taxpayers \$54 billion annually.

Oil importers would have you believe ethanol producers are getting the 51-cent-a-gallon ethanol tax subsidy. In reality, the refiners and gasoline retailers are putting it in their pockets when they purchase ethanol cheaper than the wholesale price of gas and then charge the consumer more for the ethanol-blended fuel.

Many people do not realize that when they are filling their car with unleaded, they are often getting a fuel containing 10 percent ethanol (E-10). If station owners were passing the savings from blending ethanol on to their customers, E-10 should be 5 cents cheaper than unleaded. That's not happening.

At TJ Convenience, a mom-and-pop store in Colwich, ICM is kick-starting a program that demonstrates how important ethanol is -- to consumers, to agriculture, to the environment and to our nation's security.

At the station, we use special blender pumps to mix fuel on demand to create blends ranging from 10 to 85 percent ethanol. We've priced E-10 5 cents below unleaded, and higher percentages of ethanol-enriched fuel are discounted to reflect the subsidy as well as the percentage of ethanol.

Next time you fill up, take note of the octane ratings and prices. Unleaded with no ethanol has an octane rating of 87; E-10 has an octane rating of 89. Unleaded containing 10 percent ethanol is the same thing as 89-octane "midgrade." I encourage you to ask your local station why they charge more for mid-grade when they're getting it for less.

As recently as 2006, taxpayers paid farmers \$1.8 billion to supplement their income from grain that was priced below the cost of production. Part of that money was also used to pay farmers not to farm 35 million acres of federal Conservation Reserve Program land -- 20 million of which could be used for grain without damaging the environment. If the government would release some of this land, we could see lower grain prices and even lower fuel prices while, at the same time, increasing our country's revenue from agriculture.

Many incorrectly believe that using corn to make fuel means taking food from people's mouths. Ethanol production merely removes the starch from the corn. Protein and oil are processed into distillers grains, a nutritious livestock feed marketed to feedlots at a price that reduces their feeding cost. Additionally, ICM is perfecting a process that creates additional food-grade products, allowing the most nutritious parts of the corn to remain in the human food supply chain.

It is important for consumers to know that ethanol is environmentally friendly too. The United States Geological Survey says it takes 1,851 gallons of water to extract, transport and refine one barrel of oil or 28 gallons of gasoline, compared with three gallons of water to produce one gallon of ethanol from non-irrigated corn.

A commonly used lifecycle analysis model says that roughly 17.5 pounds of carbon dioxide-equivalent in greenhouse gases are emitted during the lifecycle production and use of one gallon of gasoline on an ethanol-equivalent basis. Most experts are in agreement that the production and use of corn-based ethanol reduces the

lifecycle emissions by 20 to 40 percent per gallon of ethanol.

ICM is proud to be part of the answer, and even prouder to be doing our work in the heart of our nation's agricultural belt -- hand in hand with the great leaders and farmers of Kansas.

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