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## Forum editorial: Garbage in, garbage out on ethanol

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Two researchers who concluded it takes more energy to make ethanol than the corn-based fuel contains are guilty of "garbage in, garbage out." Their research is misleading at best, dishonest at worst.

David Pimental of Cornell University and Tad Patzek of Berkeley have done little more than recycle warmed over criticism of ethanol, most of which has been discredited by several other university and USDA studies. While Pimental and Patzek claim it takes 29 percent more fossil energy to produce a gallon of ethanol than the amount of fuel the process produces, more credible studies found ethanol delivers up to 60 percent more energy than the amount used in production.

It's probably no coincidence that Pimental and Patzek would come to their anti-ethanol findings. Both have ties to the oil industry. (See Jocie Iszler's commentary on this page.) Pimental in particular has a record of trying to discredit ethanol production, despite overwhelming evidence that it's a net energy plus for the nation.

Also, when researchers conclude traditional fossil fuels are more cost effective, they fail to include the external factors that make gasoline, for example, far more costly to the nation than home-grown ethanol. Garbage in, garbage out applies to researchers who fail to include all the costs of traditional petroleum-based fuels in their calculations. A 2003 report from the National Defense Council Foundation, "America's Achilles Heel: The Hidden Costs of Imported Oil," documents the real costs of imported oil. American imports more than 60 percent of its crude oil needs. Ethanol has the potential to reduce that dangerous dependence.

When the external costs of producing a gallon of gasoline are assessed honestly, ethanol is a better bargain, even if one accepts the flawed Pimental/Patzek energy in, energy out data. Furthermore, the record-high pump price for gasoline means ethanol-blended fuel is a good deal for consumers, and getting better.

Of eight reputable studies of ethanol's energy equation done recently, only one - by Pimental in 2001 - found negative ethanol energy production, which suggests his study is at least open to question. His

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recent collaboration with [Berkeley's Patzek should not be](#) taken seriously.

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