



CAN OILSEEDS CHANGE THE WORLD?

Buzz Word of the Week

Bio-fuel

Solid, liquid or gas fuel derived from recently dead biological material. It is most often produced from plants like soy, corn, wheat (ethanol).

Jatropha is not a plant we will find anywhere in North America, but for many places near the Equator, it has the potential to provide access to the same modern energy services we have grown accustomed to.

By Benoît Rivard,
Energy Programmer at One Sky

Bio-fuel and bio-diesel have received a lot of criticism. Experts blame the mass consumption of soy, corn and wheat used in production of bio-fuel for a reduction in available food crops desperately needed to feed our developing nations.

European countries with a quota for biofuels also took a lot of heat for turning to mass production of bio-fuel. This, to me, was so counter-intuitive; especially when these countries are importing the biofuel from halfway around the world.

Bio-fuel and Bio-diesel have received such bad press and yet, they can contribute to a broader movement of reducing our dependence on fossil fuels. The key is how the bio-fuel is produced and who benefits from its production, transformation and use.

For an example of how bio-fuel can provide a sustainable and low-impact solution to a community's energy needs, we should spin the globe and pin our finger on Mali, a country in West Africa about the size and shape of Ontario.

MFC Nyetaa, a local organisation and partner with One Sky, has pioneered a jatropha-fuelled rural electrification project for a village of 10,000 people. Jatropha is an inedible oilseed that is able to grow in a semi-arid climate and is native to Africa. It is an ideal secondary source of revenue for the villagers because they are able to grow crops of jatropha on their marginal lands. It also requires a minimal amount of water to produce its valuable oilseeds.

The revenue for local jatropha growers is three-fold: i) the seeds are sold to the cooperative of jatropha growers in the village; ii) the seeds are then pressed by the cooperative, which adds value to the original seed; iii) the jatropha oil is sold to a social enterprise that operates the local power house.

Essentially, there are two ways to use the jatropha oil (or other form of bio-fuel): one can either convert the engine to run on pure filtered oil or one can process the oil to make it capable of running in any engine. The latter requires an excessive amount of water as well as caustic soda, concentrated sulphuric acid and methanol, which doesn't make the process very environmentally friendly.

However, by converting the generator engines to run on pure jatropha oil, MFC Nyetaa has found an innovative way to produce clean electricity in a rural village with a very low-impact on the environment and social benefits for the community.

While we may not find any Jatropha in the Bulkley Valley any time soon, we can take inspiration from such a creative solution. It should also make us reflect on this stigma around bio-fuels and whether there are sustainable solutions to produce and use them.

For more information on this project in Mali, visit malifolkcenter.org.

In The Neighbourhood

Canadians Cloe Whittaker and Tyson Jerry are attempting to **break the world record** for the longest journey in a vehicle running on an alternative fuel.

They will embark on a 45,000 Km road trip across North America in a van powered by the waste vegetable oil from restaurants.

Whittaker and Jerry will be stopping at schools and local groups to talk about sustainability. Their **Driven to Sustain** campaign will also produce a film documentary focussing on projects and people across North America who have embraced earth-friendly ventures



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