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Published on Sunday, January 23, 2011 by [The Guardian/UK](#)

Food Speculation: 'People Die from Hunger While Banks Make a Killing on Food'

It's not just bad harvests and climate change – it's also speculators that are behind record prices. And it's the planet's poorest who pay

by John Vidal

Just under three years ago, people in the village of Gumbi in western Malawi went unexpectedly hungry. Not like Europeans do if they miss a meal or two, but that deep, gnawing hunger that prevents sleep and dulls the senses when there has been no food for weeks.

Oddly, there had been no drought, the usual cause of malnutrition and hunger in southern Africa, and there was plenty of food in the markets. For no obvious reason the price of staple foods such as maize and rice nearly doubled in a few months. Unusually, too, there was no evidence that the local merchants were hoarding food. It was the same story in 100 other developing countries. There were food riots in more than 20 countries and governments had to ban food exports and subsidize staples heavily.

The explanation offered by the UN and food experts was that a "perfect storm" of natural and human factors had combined to hyper-inflate prices. US farmers, UN agencies said, had [taken millions of acres of land out of production to grow biofuels](#) for vehicles, oil and fertiliser prices had risen steeply, the Chinese were shifting to meat-eating from a vegetarian diet, and climate-change linked droughts were affecting major crop-growing areas. The UN said that an extra 75m people became malnourished because of the price rises.

But a new theory is emerging among traders and economists. The same banks, hedge funds and financiers whose speculation on the global money markets caused the sub-prime mortgage crisis are thought to be causing food prices to yo-yo and inflate. The charge against them is that by taking advantage of the deregulation of global commodity markets they are making billions from speculating on food and causing misery around the world.

[As food prices soar again](#) to beyond 2008 levels, it becomes clear that everyone is now being affected. Food prices are now rising by up to 10% a year in Britain and Europe. What is more, says the UN, prices [can be expected to rise at least 40%](#) in the next decade.

There has always been modest, even welcome, speculation in food prices and it traditionally worked like this. Farmer X protected himself against climatic or other risks by "hedging", or agreeing to sell his crop in advance of the harvest to Trader Y. This guaranteed him a price, and allowed him to plan ahead and invest further, and it allowed Trader Y to profit, too. In a bad year, Farmer X got a good return but in a good year Trader Y did better.

When this process of "hedging" was tightly regulated, it worked well enough. The price of real food on the real world market was still set by the real forces of supply and demand.

But all that changed in the mid-1990s. Then, following heavy lobbying by banks, hedge funds and free market politicians in the US and Britain, the regulations on commodity markets were steadily abolished. Contracts to buy and sell foods were turned into "derivatives" that could be bought and sold among traders who had nothing to do with agriculture. [In effect a new, unreal market in "food speculation" was born.](#) Cocoa, fruit juices, sugar, staples, meat and coffee are all now global commodities, along with oil, gold and metals. Then in 2006 came the US sub-prime disaster and banks and traders stampeded to move billions of dollars in pension funds and equities into safe commodities, and especially foods.

"We first became aware of this [food speculation] in 2006. It didn't seem like a big factor then. But in 2007/8 it really spiked up," said Mike Masters, fund manager at Masters Capital Management, who [testified to the US Senate in 2008 that speculation](#) was driving up global food prices. "When you looked at the flows there was strong evidence. I know a lot of traders and they confirmed what was happening. Most of the business is now speculation – I would say 70-80%."

Masters says the markets are now heavily distorted by investment banks: "Let's say news comes about bad crops and rain somewhere. Normally the price would rise about \$1 [a bushel]. [But] when you have a 70-80% speculative market it goes up \$2-3 to account for the extra costs. It adds to the volatility. It will end badly as all Wall Street fads do. It's going to blow up."

The speculative food market is truly vast, agrees Hilda Ochoa-Brillembourg, president of the Strategic Investment Group in New York. She estimates speculative demand for commodity futures has increased since 2008 by 40-80% in agricultural futures.

But the speculation is not just in staple foods. Last year, London hedge fund Armajaro bought 240,000 tonnes, or more than 7%, of the world's stocks of cocoa beans, [helping to drive chocolate to its highest price in 33 years.](#) Meanwhile, the price of coffee shot up 20% in just three days as a direct result of hedge funds betting on the price of coffee falling.

Olivier de Schutter, [UN rapporteur on the right to food](#), is in no doubt that speculators are behind the surging prices. "Prices of wheat, maize and rice have increased very significantly but this is not linked to low stock levels or harvests, but rather to traders reacting to information and speculating on the markets," he says.

"People die from hunger while the banks make a killing from betting on food," says Deborah Doane, director of the World Development Movement in London.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation remains diplomatically non-committal, saying, in June, that: "Apart from actual changes in supply and demand of some commodities, the upward swing might also have been amplified by speculation in organised future markets."

The UN is backed by Ann Berg, one of the world's most experienced futures traders. She argues that differentiating between commodities futures markets and commodity-related investments in agriculture is impossible.

"There is no way of knowing exactly [what is happening]. We had the housing bubble and the credit default. The commodities market is another lucrative playing field [where] traders take a fee. It's a sensitive issue. [Some] countries buy direct from the markets. As a friend of mine says: 'What for a poor man is a crust, for a rich man is a securitised asset class.'"

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Published on Monday, January 3, 2011 by [The Guardian/UK](#)

WikiLeaks: US Targets EU Over GM Crops

US embassy cable recommends drawing up list of countries for 'retaliation' over opposition to genetic modification

by John Vidal, environment editor

The US embassy in Paris advised Washington to start a military-style trade war against any [European Union](#) country which opposed genetically modified ([GM](#)) crops, newly released WikiLeaks cables show.

Greenpeace activists stand on an artwork in front of the European Commission headquarters in Brussels December 9, 2010. The US embassy in Paris advised Washington to start a military-style trade war against any European Union country which opposed genetically modified crops, newly released WikiLeaks cables show. (REUTERS/Francois Lenoir)

In response to moves by France to ban a Monsanto GM corn variety in late 2007, the ambassador, Craig Stapleton, a friend and business partner of former US president George Bush, asked Washington to [penalise the EU and particularly countries which did not support the use of GM crops](#).

"Country team Paris recommends that we calibrate a target retaliation list that causes some pain across the EU since this is a collective responsibility, but that also focuses in part on the worst culprits.

"The list should be measured rather than vicious and must be sustainable over the long term, since we should not expect an early victory. Moving to retaliation will make clear that the current path has real costs to EU interests and could help strengthen European pro-biotech voices," said Stapleton, who with Bush co-owned the St Louis-based Texas Rangers baseball team in the 1990s.

In other newly released cables, US diplomats around the world are found to have pushed GM crops as a strategic government and commercial imperative.

Because many Catholic bishops in developing countries have been vehemently opposed to the controversial crops, the US applied particular pressure to the pope's advisers.

Cables from the US embassy in the [Vatican](#) show that the US believes the pope is broadly supportive of the crops after sustained lobbying of senior Holy See advisers, but regrets that he has not yet stated his support. The US state department special adviser on biotechnology as well as government biotech advisers based in Kenya lobbied Vatican insiders to persuade the pope to declare his backing. "... met with [US monsignor] Fr Michael Osborn of the Pontifical Council Cor Unum, offering a chance to push the Vatican on biotech issues, and an opportunity for post to analyse the current state of play on biotech in the Vatican generally," says one cable in 2008.

"Opportunities exist to press the issue with the Vatican, and in turn to influence a wide segment of the population in Europe and the developing world," says another.

But in a setback, the US embassy found that its closest ally on GM, Cardinal Renato Martino, head of the powerful Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and the man who mostly represents the pope at the United Nations, had withdrawn his support for the US.

"A Martino deputy told us recently that the cardinal had co-operated with embassy Vatican on biotech over the past two years in part to compensate for his vocal disapproval of the Iraq war and its aftermath – to keep relations with the USG [US government] smooth. According to our source, Martino no longer feels the need to take this approach," says the cable.

In addition, the cables show US diplomats working directly for GM companies such as Monsanto. "In response to recent urgent requests by [Spanish rural affairs ministry] state secretary Josep Puxeu and Monsanto, post requests renewed US government support of [Spain's](#) science-based agricultural biotechnology position through high-level US government intervention."

It also emerges that Spain and the US have worked closely together to [persuade the EU not to strengthen biotechnology laws](#). In one cable, the embassy in Madrid writes: "If Spain falls, the rest of Europe will follow."

The cables show that not only did the Spanish government ask the US to keep pressure on Brussels but that the [US knew in advance how Spain would vote](#), even before the Spanish biotech commission had reported.

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Published on Thursday, January 20, 2011 by [TED](#)

http://www.ted.com/talks/van_jones_the_economic_injustice_of_plastic.html

Van Jones: The Economic Injustice of Plastic (13 minute video)

Van Jones lays out a case against plastic pollution from the perspective of social justice.

Because plastic trash, he shows us, hits poor people and poor countries "first and worst," with consequences we all share no matter where we live and what we earn. At TEDxGPGP, he offers a few powerful ideas to help us reclaim our throwaway planet.

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Published on Sunday, January 2, 2011 by [the Independent/UK](#)

Suicide by Pesticide: India's Hidden Climate Change Catastrophe

Over the past decade, as crops have failed year after year, 200,000 farmers have killed themselves

by Alex Renton

Naryamaswamy Naik went to the cupboard and took out a tin of pesticide. Then he stood before his wife and children and drank it. "I don't know how much he had borrowed. I asked him, but he wouldn't say," Sugali Nagamma said, her tiny grandson playing at her feet. "I'd tell him: don't worry, we can sell the salt from our table."

Sugali Nagamma and her daughter, Devi, 18, with the family's drought-hit crops. Sugali's husband killed himself by swallowing pesticide in front of her. (Photo/Abbie Traylor-Smith)

Ms Nagamma, 41, showed us a picture of her husband - good-looking with an Elvis-style hairdo - on the day they married a quarter of a century ago. "He'd been unhappy for a month, but that day he was in a heavy depression. I tried to take the tin away from him but I couldn't. He died in front of us. The head of the family died in front of his wife and children - can you imagine?"

The death of Mr Naik, a smallholder in the central Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, in July 2009, is just another mark on an astonishingly long roll. Nearly 200,000 Indian farmers have killed themselves in the past decade. Like Mr Naik, a third of them choose pesticide to do it: an agonizing, drawn-out death with vomiting and convulsions.

The death toll is extrapolated from the Indian authorities' figures. But the journalist Palagummi Sainath is certain the scale of the epidemic of rural suicides is underestimated and that it is getting worse. "Wave upon wave," he says, from his investigative trips in the states of Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. "One farmer every 30 minutes in India now, and sometimes three in one family." Because standards of record-keeping vary across the nation, many suicides go unnoticed. In some Indian states, the significant numbers of women who kill themselves are not listed as "farmers", even if that is how they make their living.

Mr Sainath is an award-winning expert on rural poverty in India, a famous figure across India through his writing for The Hindu newspaper. I spoke to him at a screening of Nero's Guests, a documentary film about the suicide epidemic and some of the more eye-popping inequalities of modern India.

"Poverty has assaulted rural India," he said. "Farmers who used to be able to send their children to college now can't send them to school. For all that India has more dollar billionaires than the UK, we have 600 million poor. The wealth has not trickled down." Almost all the bereaved families report that debts and land loss because of unsuccessful crops were among their biggest problems.

The causes of that poverty are complex. Mr Sainath points to the long-term collapse of markets for farmers' produce. About half of all the suicides occur in the four states of India's cotton belt; the price of cotton in real terms, he says, is a twelfth of what it was 30 years ago. Vandana Shiva, a scientist-turned-campaigner, also links failures of cotton farming with the farmer suicides: she says the phenomenon was born in 1997 when the Indian government removed subsidies from cotton farming. This was also when genetically modified seed was widely introduced.

"Every suicide can be linked to Monsanto," says Ms Shiva, claiming that the biotech firm's modified Bt Cotton caused crop failure and poverty because it needed to be used with pesticide and fertilizers. The Prince of Wales has made the same accusation. Monsanto denies that its activities are to blame, saying that Indian rural poverty has many causes.

Beyond any argument - though no less politically charged - is the role of the weather in this story. India's climate, always complicated by the Himalayas on one side and turbulent oceans on the two others, has been particularly unreliable in recent years. In Rajasthan, in the north-west, a 10-year drought ended only this summer, while across much of India the annual monsoons have failed three times in the past decade.

India's 600 million farmers and the nation's poor are often the same people: a single failed crop tends to wipe out their savings and may lead to them losing their land. After that, there are few ways back. The drought, following a failed monsoon, that I saw in Andhra Pradesh in 2009 was the tipping point that drove Mr Naik to suicide.

Such tragedies and even the selling of children for marriage or as bonded labor - a common shock-horror news story in India - are the most dramatic results. But far more common is the story of rural families migrating, in tens of millions, to India's cities, swelling the ranks of the urban poor and leaving holes in the farming infrastructure that keeps India fed.

I visited an idyllic village, Surah na Kheda, last month in the limerick-worthy district of Tonk, Rajasthan. We arrived to find the rows of whitewashed mud-walled houses gleaming in the rising sun, while inside the courtyards women in bright saris were stirring milk to make yogurt and butter for the day's meals. Their daughters kneaded dough for the breakfast chapattis.

But there was an odd thing: a distinct lack of people. There were the old and the very young - but virtually no one of working age. Half the village, some 60 adults and many children, had gone to Jaipur, the state capital, to look for work. Even though the Diwali holiday fell the following week, no one expected their neighbors and relatives back. Times were too hard.

Prabhati Devi, 50, said four of her seven children had joined the exodus. "They had to go," she said. "Twenty years ago, we could grow all we needed, and sell things too. Now we can't grow wheat, we can't grow pulses, we can't even grow carrots, because there is not enough rain. So we go to the cities, looking for money."

She looked bereaved as she talked of the damage the 10-year drought had done. "It crushes people," she said. "Before, we were able to deal with drought. It would come every four years, and you could prepare. We would store grain and people could share it. In the past, when your

buffalo wasn't giving milk, neighbors would share theirs. But now kindness is no longer possible."

I found the other end of Surah na Kheda's story under a flyover in Jaipur. Here, in the early morning, hundreds of men and boys, farmers from all over northern India, gather looking for work as laborers on the city's building sites. Many of them sleep under the flyover, and their clothes were stiff with dirt. The air was tense, and smelled of drugs and cheap alcohol.

Shankar Lal, one of the Surah na Kheda émigrés, was sipping tea at a stall under the flyover with half a dozen other young men from the village, waiting for a contractor to give them a lift. "If the rains came back we would be farmers again. But will they?" He did not think so: "In 10 years' time, there will be no village. Everyone will be here in the city. Or they will be dead."

The men were working for 150 rupees (£2.15) a day, decorating a house in one of Jaipur's posh suburbs. This is relatively good work, and they had all found a floor to sleep on. In another building site, we found a seven-strong rural family who slept in the cement store. The mother and grandmother were working for less than £1 a day, carrying cement and bricks on their heads up precarious bamboo scaffolding. In one half-built block of flats a baby slept in the dust next to the cement mixer. None of these people were happy to be in the city. "If we could survive at home we would go straight back," I was told.

Many of the laborers on the sites were children, some as young as 12: an interrupted education is another part of the social fallout of rural collapse. In Rajasthan, most older people in the villages told me they had not gone to school, but they were proud that their children had. However, the new poverty brought about by the "chaos in the weather" was keeping their grandchildren out of school.

According to the World Food Program, 20 million more people joined the ranks of India's hungry in the past decade, and half of all the country's children are underweight. Some analysts say that fast-developing India is performing worse than some of the poorest countries, such as Liberia and Haiti, in addressing the basic issue of hunger. With so many farmers giving up, the question is how India will feed the entire country, not just its poor.

It is widely agreed that there have been radical shifts in the weather patterns in India in the past two decades; what is less certain are the causes. Is the change in the weather "climate change"? For many development workers, the question needs answering, because the collapse of India's rural economy - if it continues - will bring about a catastrophe that will affect people far beyond India's borders: even rumors of a poor monsoon or bad harvest in India tends to send food prices on the world commodity markets soaring, as they did again this spring.

Alka Awasthi, of Cecoedecon, a Rajasthani rural poverty organization part-funded by Oxfam, asks: "When is the data going to catch up with the stories? Why don't the scientists come and listen to people who actually work with the rain? They don't know what a woman like Prabhati Devi is dealing with."

But at Rajasthan's Institute of Development Studies, Surjit Singh believes the calamitous weather shifts are as much to do with changing patterns of farming, growing population and failed government policies as any greater human-induced change to the climate. "The state has

failed the rural poor, and so has the private sector. Economic liberalization has clearly failed. How long can the boom go on? The economy may be growing at 9 per cent but food-price inflation is running at 16 to 18 per cent."

Dr Singh is in no doubt, though, that the changes in weather have increased poverty in rural India - and that there lies a huge injustice. "Climate change puts the onus on the poor to adapt - but that's wrong. Who is using the planes, the cars and the plastic bottles? Not the poor man with no drinking water."

For Mrs Devi and Sugali Nagamma, though, such debates are meaningless. I asked Mrs Devi if she had a question to ask me. "If these industries and factories stop burning petrol and sending poison into the atmosphere will it bring our rains back?" I had to tell her I did not know.

For more on Oxfam's work in India visit: www.oxfam.org.uk/climate

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Published on Monday, January 3, 2011 by [OpenSecrets Blog](#)

Senators Supporting Ethanol Subsidies Reap Riches From Corn Interests

by Michael Beckel

In habitually partisan Washington, D.C., a bipartisan group of senators late last month helped extend contentious federal tax provisions designed to aid domestic ethanol production.

The senators mostly shared common ground on two fronts: geography and contributions from the political action committees of ethanol producers, high-profile ethanol promoters and the leading industry groups for corn, a [Center for Responsive Politics](#) analysis indicates.

This bipartisan group of 15 senators signed a letter in late November demanding an extension of U.S. ethanol subsidies, and they have received notable campaign contributions during the past six years from pro-ethanol companies and interest groups.

These senators each collected, on average, \$5,000 from bioengineering and agricultural chemical company [Monsanto](#), \$4,100 from farming giant [Archer Daniels Midland](#), \$1,600 from the [National Corn Growers Association](#), \$1,200 from ethanol producer [POET LLC](#) and \$200 a piece from [Growth Energy](#) and the [Iowa Renewable Fuels Association](#). (You may download a spreadsheet showing the Center's calculations of these totals and the itemized totals for all senators signing either letter here: [EthanolMoney2010.xls](#))

The leading Republican behind the letter was Sen. [Chuck Grassley](#) (R-Iowa), who argued in the pro-ethanol missive that "allowing the provisions to expire or remain expired would threaten jobs, harm the environment, weaken our renewable fuel industries and increase our dependence on foreign oil." (Letter available as a [pdf file here](#), via the *Washington Post*.)

Since January 2005, Grassley's political committees have received about \$36,000 from the PACs of the Monsanto, POET LLC, Archer Daniels Midland, the National Corn Growers Association, Growth Energy and the Iowa Renewable Fuels Association, according to research

by the Center for Responsive Politics. Because senators run for re-election every six years, using data for six-year periods gives a more complete -- and more accurate -- picture of what interests are bankrolling a senator.

Grassley's office told [OpenSecrets Blog](#) that campaign contributions from ethanol supporters do not influence the senator's thinking on the issue.

"Sen. Grassley's campaign committee takes contributions that are legal and have no strings attached," Beth Levine, Grassley's press secretary, told [OpenSecrets Blog](#). "Sen. Grassley fights for ethanol because it's good for our national security, it's good for our environment, and it's good for good-paying jobs."

Sens. [Kit Bond](#) (R-Mo.), [Tom Harkin](#) (D-Iowa) and [Ben Nelson](#) (D-Neb.), who all signed onto Grassley's letter, have each received at least \$20,000 to their campaign committees and leadership PACs from these same ethanol-supporting political action committees since January 2005, according to the Center's research.

And Sens. [John Thune](#) (R-S.D.) and [Kent Conrad](#) (D-N.D.), who likewise signed the pro-ethanol letter, each received between \$10,000 and \$15,000 from these interests as well.

Among all pro-ethanol letter-signers, only Sen. [Sam Brownback](#) (R-Kan.) collected no money from any of these six companies and trade groups. (Brownback is retiring from the Senate in January, having been elected governor of Kansas.)

Like Grassley, Nelson stressed the economic benefits of ethanol in his home state as the reason for his support for the tax provisions.

"Sen. Nelson supports the extension of the ethanol tax credit because it will promote renewable energy, jobs and economic development in Nebraska, the number two corn-producing and number two ethanol-producing state in the country," Jake Thompson, Nelson's communications director, told [OpenSecrets Blog](#). "That's why he wants the ethanol tax credit extended, not because of campaign contributions from either supporters or opponents of ethanol."

MINIMAL CORN INDUSTRY SUPPORT FOR ANTI-SUBSIDY LAWMAKERS

[A separate letter](#) deeming the extension of the ethanol subsidies "fiscally irresponsible and environmentally unwise" was also recently produced by a different bipartisan group of senators. Major ethanol-supporting interests, however, doled out only scant amounts of campaign money in the last six years to these 17 lawmakers.

The only beneficiary of the National Corn Growers Association's PAC to sign the anti-ethanol letter was Sen. [Robert Bennett](#) (R-Utah), who is retiring after being defeated by conservative Republican Party activists in Utah earlier this year. Bennett received \$1,000 in 2008.

Sen. [Barbara Boxer](#) (D-Calif.) was the only beneficiary of Archer Daniel Midlands' PAC cash to sign onto the letter opposing the extension of the ethanol tax provisions. She's raised \$3,000 from Archer Daniels Midland's PAC since 2008.

None of the anti-ethanol letter-signers have raised any money from the Iowa Renewable Fuels Association, Growth Energy and POET LLC in the last six years, according to the Center's research.

Meanwhile, five of the 17 lawmakers who signed letter urging the expiration of the ethanol tax provisions have received relatively meager donations from Monsanto -- totaling \$12,000 --- in the last six years: Sens. [Richard Burr](#) (R-N.C.), [Tom Coburn](#) (R-Okla.), [Jon Kyl](#) (R-Ariz.), [Mike Enzi](#) (R-Wy.), Boxer and Bennett.

Frederick Boehmke, an associate professor of political science at the University of Iowa, said the disparity in cash from ethanol supporters between senators in each camp is telling.

"Groups look for members who are predisposed to support their positions," Boehmke told *OpenSecrets Blog*. "They are usually targeting people who are predisposed to support their positions and trying to get them to devote some energy to helping them out."

And if a politician bucks a supporter by a stance they take? Boehmke said there is some political risk for lawmakers, but also the flexibility to be independent and make up their own minds.

"They run the risk of not receiving support from that group in the future," he said. "But members of Congress usually aren't going to sell their vote for \$5,000, the legal limit of what a PAC can give."

During the past six year, most of the 17 senators who signed the anti-ethanol subsidy letter have received significant campaign contributions from key organizations who themselves publicly opposed the ethanol subsidy extension.

For example, the [Grocery Manufacturers Association](#) has spread \$41,500 to eight of these 17 senators during the past six years, with Susan Collins (R-Maine), Mark Warner (D-Va.), Burr, Enzi and Bennett each receiving at least \$5,500.

The [American Meat Institute](#) and [National Chicken Council](#) have each donated \$17,500 and \$13,000, respectively, to six of the 17 senators.

The [oil and gas industry](#) - another outspoken critic of ethanol subsidies and one of the most powerful political forces in Washington - has likewise generously donated to the political campaigns of a number of these senators.

Burr, for one, has received \$191,500 from people and PACs associated with the industry during the past six years. For Bennett, it's \$157,200, and Kyl, \$145,000.

SIGNIFICANT PROFITS AT STAKE

At stake this month for ethanol supporters was a 54 cent-per-gallon tariff on ethanol imports, and a 45 cent-per-gallon tax credit for blending ethanol into gasoline, known as the Volumetric Ethanol Excise Tax Credit.

Both measures would have expired at the year's end but are now extended through December 2011 as part of the tax relief and unemployment insurance extension legislation that President Barack Obama signed into law on Friday.

In addition to building relationships with federal lawmakers through campaign contributions, companies and special interests supporting ethanol subsidies are this year spending millions of dollars to lobby the federal government.

Between January and September, [Monsanto](#), which bioengineers corn designed to produce the most ethanol per acre, has also spent \$6.6 million on federal lobbying efforts, according to the Center's research. [Archer Daniels Midlands](#), a leading producer of ethanol and biodiesel, meanwhile, spent \$1 million on its lobbying efforts.

Ethanol producers [Growth Energy](#) and [POET LLC](#) have spent \$1.2 million and \$700,000, respectively, on lobbying this year, according to the Center's research.

The [National Corn Growers Association](#), meanwhile, has spent \$390,000 on lobbying this year.

The Iowa Renewable Fuels Association, another trade group, does not currently hire federal lobbyists.

A CONTINUING BATTLE

As the fight about these tax incentives continue in 2011, officials at ethanol-producing companies such as POET LLC and Growth Energy hope they will continue to win supporters -- regardless of party lines and regardless of geography.

"We think in the near future support will broaden beyond Midwest," said Nathan Schock, director of public relations at South Dakota-based POET LLC.

"There is abundant cellulose in every state," Schock continued, highlighting his company's push to produce cellulosic ethanol, which can be made from corncobs, grasses and other plants not exclusive to the Midwest.

In the meantime, ethanol supporters will continue to raise their political profile within an energy sector that has long been dominated by big-spending oil and natural gas interests. And they will continue to use campaign contributions as part of this outreach.

"Like every industry, we support candidates who understand and support our issues," Schock told *OpenSecrets Blog*.

His peer at Nebraska-based Growth Energy agreed.

"Growth Energy's political support has been directed toward those lawmakers who have demonstrated their commitment to renewable fuels, like ethanol, and rural America," Chris Thorne, Growth Energy's director of public affairs, told *OpenSecrets Blog*.

"Ethanol could never match our political opponents dollar for dollar," Thorne continued. "Big Oil and Big Food flood Washington, D.C., with lobbyists, paid media and campaign donations. But

even while we fight above our weight class, we can win the debate because the facts are on our side."

But a novel -- even bizarre -- coalition of special interest groups may also factor into the future of domestic ethanol subsidies.

Although unsuccessful this year, 60 advocacy groups from across the ideological spectrum united to oppose ethanol subsidies, criticizing them as wasteful. These detractors included Democratic-aligned activist group MoveOn.org, Public Citizen, the Sierra Club, the American Bankers Association, the National Taxpayers Union, the libertarian Competitive Enterprise Institute and Tea Party-aligned FreedomWorks.

This [anti-ethanol subsidy letter](#) marked the first occasion -- and perhaps, not the last -- that adversaries MoveOn.org and FreedomWorks had cooperated on an issue.

Center for Responsive Politics researcher Spencer MacColl contributed to this report

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Published on Friday, January 28, 2011 by [Inter Press Service](#)

Arctic Defrost Dumping Snow on U.S. and Europe

by Stephen Leahy

UXBRIDGE, Canada - The world's northern freezer is on rapid defrost as large volumes of warm water are pouring into the Arctic Ocean, speeding the melt of sea ice, according to a new study.

The world's northern freezer is on rapid defrost as large volumes of warm water are pouring into the Arctic Ocean, speeding the melt of sea ice, according to a new study. (NASA Goddard Photo)

Surface temperatures in parts of the Arctic have been 21 degrees C above normal for more than a month in recent weeks.

"Boats were still in the water during the first week of January," said David Phillips, a senior climatologist with Environment Canada, referring to southern Baffin Island, some 2,000 km north of Montreal. This is a region that receives just four or five hours of weak sunlight during the long winter. Temperatures normally range from -25 to -35 degrees C but were above zero on some days in January.

"It's impossible for many people in parts of the eastern Arctic to safely get on the ice to hunt much-needed food for their families - for the second winter in a row," Phillips said in a report.

The warming and melting of the Arctic is happening much faster than expected and new data reveals that huge volumes of warmer water from the North Atlantic are now flowing into and warming up the Arctic Ocean, researchers reported Friday in the journal Science.

"In the past hundred years the waters in the Fram Strait have warmed about two degrees C," says co-author Thomas Marchitto, of Colorado University's Institute of Arctic and Alpine Research.

The Fram Strait between Greenland and Svalbard (Spitsbergen) is the major connection between the Arctic Ocean and the world ocean. An international team of researchers analysed marine sediments and found that temperatures of the northward inflowing Atlantic water varied by just a few tenths of a degree Celsius during the past 2,000 years. However, in the last hundred years temperatures have shot up by two degrees C.

"What's happening here is very unusual compared to the last 2,000 years," Marchitto told IPS.

Climate change is believed to be behind this warmer water because over 90 percent of additional heat trapped in the atmosphere from the burning of fossil fuels like coal, oil and natural gas is going into the oceans, he said.

"The accelerated decrease of the Arctic sea ice cover and the warming of ocean and atmosphere in the Arctic, as measured during the past decades, are in part related to an increased heat transfer from the Atlantic," said co-author Robert Spielhagen, a palaeoceanographer at the Academy of Sciences, Humanities and Literature in Mainz, Germany.

Sea ice has declined dramatically during the short Arctic summers in recent years, with some experts now projecting that the ice cover will be essentially gone in as little as five years. Just a few years ago, no one thought a summer ice-free Arctic could happen before 2060.

The warming Arctic and melting sea ice is a planetary-scale change since the Arctic Ocean covers 14 million sq km, an area almost as big as Russia. The Arctic and Antarctic polar regions are key drivers of Earth's weather and climate. The rapid defrosting of the Arctic has already altered the climate system, researchers now agree.

IPS previously broke the story revealing that the snow and cold in the eastern United States and Europe during the winter of 2009-10 was likely the result of the loss of Arctic sea ice. The same thing has happened this year.

As more and more sea ice melts, there is more open water to absorb the summer sun's heat. A day of 24-hour summer sun in the Arctic puts more heat on the surface of the ocean than a day in the tropics, James Overland of the NOAA/Pacific Marine Environmental Laboratory in the United States told IPS.

That extra heat in the ocean is gradually released into the lower atmosphere from October to January as the region slowly re-freezes months later than normal. This is a fundamental change - a large part of the Arctic Ocean is radiating heat instead of being cold and ice-covered. That has disrupted wind circulation patterns in the northern hemisphere, reported Overland and other researchers at the International Polar Year Oslo Science Conference in Norway last June.

The result: the Arctic stays warm and mid-latitude regions become colder and receive more snow for much of the winter. Last December was the coldest south Florida has experienced in more than a century of record-keeping.

Most of Britain suffered through its coldest December ever. Up in the Arctic, Coral Harbour on the northwest corner of Hudson Bay was above zero degrees C for two days in early January for the first time in history. Much of the eastern Arctic centred around Baffin Island averaged +21C above normal between Dec. 17 and Jan. 15 this year.

This looks to be the new normal since Arctic experts agree the melting sea ice is now locked into a death spiral.

"In future, cold and snowy winters will be the rule rather than the exception" in the eastern United States and Europe, Overland previously told IPS.

This week the U.S. northeast suffered through its sixth major snowstorm this winter, breaking all snowfall records.

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23 January 2011

Today, car2go N.A. LLC and Whole Foods Market (Nasdaq: WFMI)

Lamar in Austin, Texas announced that four car2go dedicated parking spots are now available at the natural and organic food retailer's flagship store at 525 North Lamar Boulevard, Austin, Texas 78703. Whole Foods Market shoppers and Team Members who are car2go members will now have the convenience of parking and sharing car2go vehicles.

"Whole Foods Market is committed to environmental sustainability and making a difference in our community," said Rebecca Scofield, Austin community relations coordinator for Whole Foods Market. "We believe that this partnership with car2go will support our continued dedication to our core values."

After thirty years of business, Whole Foods Market maintains its unique core values that include satisfying and delighting shoppers, supporting Team Member happiness, and caring about environment and community. In 2009, Whole Foods Market stores raised more than \$3.5 million through their community giving days, an initiative where five percent of sales proceeds go to community nonprofits. The grocer has also been the recipient of the EPA's Green Power awards for the last four years for its efforts in accelerating the development of renewable energy capacity. Before partnering with car2go, Whole Foods Market had already made efforts to support alternative transportation with the addition of an electric vehicle charging station in April 2010.

Since their North American launch in November 2009, car2go has registered more than 15,000 members and has been working with several organizations and businesses within the Austin community to lay the groundwork for innovative transportation solutions. As one of these businesses, Whole Foods Market will now be able to offer its shoppers who are also car2go

members the convenience of having car2gos at the market's doorstep. Members can rent the vehicles spontaneously without having to make reservations in advance and have the flexibility to return the car to any available public parking spot within the operating area.

"Whole Foods Market maintains a strong commitment to a sustainable future and we believe this partnership will reinforce that commitment," said Nicholas Cole, President and CEO of car2go N.A. LLC. "car2go is honored to be associated with Whole Foods Market as they continue to provide environmentally sustainable alternatives for their shoppers and employees."

About car2go

car2go is a groundbreaking mobility program redefining individual transportation in rapidly growing urban areas. Launched by Daimler, it provides a fleet of free-floating, low-emission, self-service smart fortwo cars for rent distributed all over the city. The smart fortwo is the most fuel efficient non-hybrid vehicle in North America.

Unlike other carsharing programs, car2go is not station-based. A network of vehicles is located throughout the greater downtown Austin area and can be accessed "on-demand" or reserved for up to 24 hours in advance. For "on-demand" access, members simply swipe their membership card against the vehicle's windshield. car2go allows its members to use the vehicle for as long as they like, without committing to a specific return time or location. They can finish the rental in any available public parking space within the car2go business area or at one of the specially marked car2go spaces. car2go charges customers only for the actual use of the vehicle, with rental periods as short as per-minute. Attractive "by-the-minute" rates include costs for fuel, insurance, parking and maintenance.

The innovation and environmental sustainability of car2go has earned international acclaim: In May 2010 car2go was honored by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) with its prestigious '2010 EPA Clean Air Excellence Award'. In September 2010 car2go was recognized by the Austin Chamber of Commerce with the '2010 Greater Austin Business Award' for its positive impact on traffic in the city. In November 2010 car2go received the 'Clean Tech Media Award' in the category of 'Mobility' in Berlin. Further information on car2go is available at www.car2go.com and www.media.daimler.com/ms/car2go/e.

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Consumers Don't Want Biotech Food in their Food Pyramid

Consumer group calls out USDA for putting biotech interests before consumer health
WASHINGTON - January 31 - National consumer organization Food & Water Watch demonstrated today outside a press conference by U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius announcing the new Dietary Guidelines for Americans. Along with its coalition partners, Food &

Water Watch drew attention to the USDA's decision last week to allow the unrestricted planting of genetically engineered alfalfa, as well as the FDA's pending approval of the first GE animal to be approved for human consumption - AquaBounty's AquaAdvantage salmon.

"Despite widespread consumer rejection of genetically engineered food, our federal agencies seem more dedicated to the financial success of the biotech industry than protecting the health and environment of consumers or the livelihoods of small- and medium-sized farmers," said Wenonah Hauter, executive director of Food & Water Watch. "They may as well add a level to the food pyramid and tell us what our recommended allowance of GMOs should be."

A 2009 Consumer Reports poll revealed that the majority of consumers would not eat genetically modified food, while a Food & Water Watch poll conducted with Lake Research Partners in September, 2010, showed that 78 percent of Americans were against the approval of a GE salmon for human consumption and 91 percent believed the FDA should not allow transgenic pigs, chicken and cattle into the food supply until the agency could perform its own safety studies.

"The biotech industry is pushing hard to genetically engineer every facet of our food system even though the long term human health consequences are unknown," said Hauter. "We've already witnessed the spread of 'superweeds' and contamination of non-GE crops from genetically engineered plants, but these facts seem to get buried by the millions of dollars spent by the biotech lobby to influence Congress and government agencies like the FDA and USDA."

A November, 2010, analysis done by Food & Water Watch shows that over the last decade, top food and agriculture biotechnology firms and trade associations spent over half a billion dollars - \$572 million - in campaign contributions and lobbying Congress in support of controversial projects like GE food.

"The U.S. Dietary Guidelines for Americans are purportedly evidence-based to promote health and reduce risk of chronic diseases," said Hauter. "If this is truly the case, the USDA and HHS need to take into account the evidence that the public is concerned about the potential health, environmental and economic threats of GE foods and they should not infiltrate our food supply."

Additional resources: Statement by Wenonah Hauter on USDA's deregulation of GE alfalfa: <http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/pressreleases/ge-alfalfa/>

Biotech lobbying analysis: <http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/briefs/food-and-agriculture-biotechnology-industry-influence/>

Summary of Food & Water Watch/Lake Research survey on attitudes toward GE fish: <http://documents.foodandwaterwatch.org/release-FWW-Omnibus.pdf>

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Food & Water Watch is a nonprofit consumer organization that works to ensure clean water and safe food. We challenge the corporate control and abuse of our food and water resources by empowering people to take action and by transforming the public consciousness about what we eat and drink.