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## Biofuels are part of the solution

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Louis Porter's article (Aug. 21) on the closing of the Biocardel Vermont biodiesel plant in Swanton highlighted some of the challenges facing this important renewable energy industry.

First, clean-energy firms like Biocardel are dealing with the same economic pressures facing all Vermont businesses. Scores of biodiesel plants nationwide have ceased production, trimmed payrolls and laid off employees; those are jobs this state and the nation cannot afford to lose.

Yet the federal government's insistence that we "break our addiction to foreign oil" is in conflict with itself. On the one hand, Congress has instituted a renewable fuel standard that mandates increased production and use of biofuels through 2022 (with an emphasis on "advanced" biofuel, from crop residues and algae). At the same time, Congress has failed to reinstate an expired tax credit to this industry that once drove domestic biodiesel production (and now is the leading cause of plant closures nationwide).

And for that segment of the public that is critical of government incentives, consider this: Global incentives for the petroleum industry and fossil fuels hit \$557 billion in 2008, vs. only about \$46 billion for renewable sources of power.

This discussion comes at an important time for the biofuels industry, which is working to ensure the sustainable production of clean-burning fuels from a variety of sources, including used vegetable oils and animal fats, algae, soybeans, and more.

While some concern has been expressed about the impact of biofuel production on the price and availability of food, it should be noted that the World Bank recently reported that increases in the cost of food are actually driven by rising energy costs — the same costs the biofuels industry is trying to reduce. Several other studies, including the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa, Imperial College London, and Camco International, found that crops cannot only be grown in a sustainable manner for biofuel production, but that practice can also contribute to needed improvements in cultivation and land use.

Consider the advantages of a local supply for some of our transportation and heating fuel and the loss of Biocardel comes into focus — no toxic oil spills, dramatic reductions in carbon dioxide and particulate emissions (compared to petrodiesel), no military deployments to protect local fuel production, and an increase in good-paying jobs, new markets for agricultural products, and more energy dollars staying in Vermont.

Susan Allen is executive director of Renewable Energy Vermont, a Montpelier-based nonprofit organization.

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