OurEnergyPolicy.org
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Clearing the Skies:
The Future of Aviation Fuels

Summary of Comments - March 26, 2025

On March 26, 2025, OurEnergyPolicy hosted a discussion on the future of sustainable aviation fuels and their pivotal role in reducing the environmental impact of the aviation industry. Find the recording here.

SPEAKERS

Kathy Bergren
Director of Federal Government Relations, Gevo, Inc.

Tom Michels
Director of Government Affairs, United Airlines

Chuck Chaitovitz
VP of Environmental Affairs & Sustainability, U.S. Chamber of Commerce

Valerie Sarisky-Reed
Director, U.S. DOE Bioenergy Technologies Office

Summary of Key Points

- About 70% of Sustainable Aviation Fuels (SAF) come from fats, oils, and greases.
  - These ingredients are refined with the Hydrotreated Esters and Fatty Acids (HEFA) process to create SAF.
- Domestic use of SAF grew from 5 million gallons in 2021 to 93 million gallons in 2024.
  - Even though the U.S. is the largest producer of biofuels today, roughly 67% of SAF demand was met with imported fuels.
- Stable and supportive domestic policies, the continuation of mandates from foreign countries, and support from airlines is needed to grow the SAF industry.

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Latest Reports and Initiatives

- The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) has led federal efforts on scaling Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) production through the Synthetic Aviation Fuel Grand Challenge with a goal of producing 3 billion gallons per year of domestic SAF by 2030.
- According to the DOE's SAF Pathways to Commercial Liftoff report:
  - SAF is the only near-term option to decarbonizing aviation fuels.
  - SAF can be used in the existing aircraft fleet, so there would be less need to invest in advanced aircraft technology.
- While the U.S. has voluntary SAF markets for interested airlines, the EU and other international markets are requiring the use of SAF.
- Biomass research is looking at how we can recreate energy dense intermediates from feedstocks so they can be transported more efficiently.
- Tax incentives moving forward need to be durable and meaningful. The longer a tax incentive lasts, the greater its economic impact on fledgling industries.

Scaling-Up Domestic Production

- Domestic use of SAF grew from 5 million gallons in 2021 to 93 million gallons in 2024.
  - However, only 26 million gallons of SAF were produced in the U.S.
  - The other 67% of SAF demand was met with imported fuel.
- Energy crops-- crops raised specifically to be used as feedstock in biofuels-- can bolster soil health and agricultural economics for family farms.
- The Hydrotreated Esters and Fatty Acids (HEFA) process is not only used to produce SAF.
  - Renewable diesel and Naphta, a flammable liquid hydrocarbon mixture, are also produced alongside SAF through the HEFA process.
  - As we learn to utilize biomass for a variety of end-use fuels, these markets which use similar processes can work together-- to both support reliable supply chains for feedstocks and reduce costs.
- Co-processing, the utilization of petroleum refining assets for biofuels production, can help scale up biofuel and SAF production with existing infrastructure.
  - Major petroleum companies are working with the DOE Bioenergy Technologies Office on the utilization of these assets.