

Porter Alliance at Imperial Special Seminar

“How Land Use Change Alters Our Thinking About Biofuels”

Timothy D. Searchinger

Visiting Scholar and Lecturer in Public and International Affairs,
Woodrow Wilson School, Princeton University,
Transatlantic Fellow, The German Marshall Fund of the U.S.

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Lecture at 15.15

Venue: Sir Alexander Fleming Building Lecture Theatre G34
Exhibition Road, South Kensington

Please register your attendance at eeo@imperial.ac.uk

Abstract

Most prior studies have found that substituting biofuels for gasoline will reduce greenhouse gasses because growing the crops for biofuels sequesters carbon. These analyses have failed to count the carbon emissions that will occur either as farmers worldwide directly convert forest or grassland to produce biofuels or as farmers worldwide respond to higher prices and convert forest and grassland to new cropland to replace the grain (or cropland) diverted to biofuels. Two new papers in Science magazine have now calculated that the emissions from this land use change for most biofuels that use productive land are likely to mean that these biofuels overall result in substantially increases greenhouse gas emissions over 30 years. Even advanced biofuels from biomass, if produced on good cropland, could have adverse greenhouse gas effects. Tim Searchinger from Princeton University and the German Marshall Fund of the U.S., the lead author of one of the papers, will present its findings, discuss uncertainties and criticisms of the paper, and discuss policy implications, including potential implications for proposed new U.S. and European Union biofuel mandates.

Biography

Tim Searchinger is a Visiting Scholar and Lecturer in Public and International Affairs at Princeton's Woodrow Wilson School. He is also a Transatlantic Fellow of the German Marshall Fund of the United States, and a Senior Fellow at the Georgetown Environmental Law and Policy Institute. Trained as a lawyer, Searchinger now works primarily on interdisciplinary environmental issues related to agriculture.

Searchinger previously worked at the Environmental Defense Fund, where he co-founded the Center for Conservation Incentives, and supervised work on agricultural incentive and wetland protection programs. He was also a deputy General Counsel to Governor Robert P. Casey of Pennsylvania and a law clerk to Judge Edward R. Becker of the United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit. He is a graduate, summa cum laude, of Amherst College and holds a J.D. from Yale Law School where he was Senior Editor of the *Yale Law Journal*. Searchinger first proposed the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program to USDA and worked closely with state officials to develop programs that have now restored one million acres of riparian buffers and wetlands to protect priority rivers and estuaries in Maryland, Minnesota, and Illinois, among other states. Searchinger received a National Wetlands Protection Award from the Environmental Protection Agency in 1992 for a technical book about the functions of seasonal wetlands of which he was principal author. His most recent writings focus on the greenhouse gas emissions from biofuels, and agricultural conservation strategies to clean-up nutrient runoff. He is writing a book discussing effects of agriculture on the environment and ways to reduce them.