

Auto Industry and FFVs

The myth is that engines are different for flex fuel autos and non flex fuel autos yet auto dealerships' parts catalogs attribute the same part number to both engines. The biggest barrier to acceptance of mid level blends is this myth also perpetuated by the wise talking heads in government and the ethanol industry. Auto industry officials must get a real laugh as the ethanol industry and government ineptly research the compatibility of higher ethanol blends with so called non flex engines.

Injectors have a higher flow rate for flex autos and yet the standard auto's computer demonstrates its ability to adjust to midlevel blends as the check engine light does not come on when blends up to half E85 are used. This means the computer correctly adjusts engine and emission control systems when midlevel blends of ethanol are used. The millions of trouble free miles already traveled by standard autos using nearly half splash blended E85 assure us that higher flow injectors are not needed for mid level ethanol blends. Also, Part 88 definitions section of the clean air act declares nearly every car in America is a flexible fuel auto: "flexible fuel vehicle means any motor vehicle (or motor vehicle engine) designed and engineered to run on any mixture of two different fuels". This Clean Air Act definition of a Flexible Fuel Vehicle does not say auto manufacturers have the exclusive authority to designate which autos are flex fuel

The biggest problem caused by this is that non flex owners cannot access more cost efficient midlevel ethanol blends and are basically mandated to use only the two least cost effective blends of ethanol, E10 and E85. Due to the fast approaching E10 blend wall ethanol price has plummeted compared to gasoline price as Midwest E85 is priced a dollar/gallon less than gasoline. This price will be the norm until non flex fuel owners can conveniently access midlevel blends of ethanol here in the Midwest where the ethanol is produced. Real markets will then determine ethanol's value. We will have a Midwest higher blends distribution system in place and our clean air and energy independence will be the envy of other regions when our stations offer higher blends of ethanol at the premium pump and/or unleaded pump labeled as E85 pumps or in E85 blender pumps. Only those living in the past think they need OPEC's unleaded pump.

Except for a meteoric rise in gasoline prices Midwest locally owned plants would be losing huge sums of money and consumers' best hope for a locally produced fuel alternative would be fading as investments in ethanol plants falter.

To solve these problems we first must recognize the food for fuel argument has no basis in fact because distiller's products have enabled plentiful cellulosic materials like corn stalks etc. to replace whole kernel corn and alfalfa in beef and dairy rations. This ration shift especially in areas where wet distillers products are available means the net result is more corn is available for human consumption when corn is the feed stock for ethanol production.

We also must recognize that our current feeble efforts by the ethanol industry and government policy to establish blender pumps or other pumps selling midlevel blends of ethanol do not reflect the hundreds of millions of dollars Midwest ethanol plant investors and consumers alike are losing. Our challenge is to create a distribution system to make higher ethanol blends conveniently available to consumers.

Orrie Swayze

Wilmot, SD farmer and cow/calf beef producer

For corroborating information: Google The National Renewable Energy Lab research "Issues associated with higher blends (E17-24