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Ethanol: How much can we produce?

Innovations in America's ethanol industry are constantly delivering new ways to reduce water and energy consumption at the plant, coax more energy out of the feedstock and cut greenhouse gas emissions through use of renewable energy.

But researchers from General Motors, Auburn University and Coskata Inc. have also identified ethanol as the most efficient and productive way to create renewable fuels from biomass – such as agricultural waste, trash and other cellulosic materials – that is often otherwise left unused in the United States.

According to the paper, which was recently published by the Society of Chemical Industry in its *Journal of Chemical Technology & Biotechnology*, there is enough biomass in the United States to substantially reduce our country's dependence on foreign oil if that biomass is converted to ethanol.

That is a remarkable conclusion, and deserves recognition by the broader audience of policymakers and regulators working in Washington, DC, on our nation's energy crisis.

As oil prices spike on unrest and instability in the Middle East, research demonstrates that we have more than enough cellulosic feedstock for conversion into ethanol in this country to cut our foreign oil consumption by as much as 30 percent.

The research was completed by Rathin Datta, chief scientific officer for Coskata Inc., Mark Maher, executive director for GM Powertrain, Coleman Jones, GM biofuels implementation manager and Richard Brinker, Dean and Professor of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences at Auburn University.

Some of the paper's findings echo other work – such as the finding that ethanol substantially reduces carbon emissions, compared to other transportation fuels. But other conclusions would surprise critics of ethanol. For example, the paper concludes that using higher blends of ethanol improves the performance of today's high-compression engines, because of its superior qualities over gasoline as a fuel.

This is a study worth reading – and worth sharing. The more people understand ethanol's value as an alternative fuel, the better opportunity we have to break oil's hold over our national economy and our national security. Ethanol is the key.