

# ATLA February 2008 newsletter:

## PUBLIC MEETING

WEDNESDAY 13TH FEBRUARY 2008

6PM

ST JOHNS IN THE CITY CHURCH (cnr Willis & Dixon Sts)

Please Attend - This Is Extremely Important

Transit have begun consultation on the Ngauranga to Airport Transport Strategy - and this could see more tunnels, more roads and more flyovers being built through the heart of our city. The result will be more CO<sub>2</sub>, less oil, and a worse quality of life for Wellington residents.

But there's still time to change the plan. Already there's a strong push to make the city more pedestrian and cyclist friendly, and to invest in high-quality bus services and innovative light rail systems. Instead of throwing money away on roads, we can invest in making Wellington a more liveable, sustainable and people-centric city. So it's time to speak out!

The public meeting will give you information on what's happening, Transit's plans, the better alternatives, and how you can influence the process. The meeting will be short, and there will be refreshments on offer. So take a bit of time to participate in the debate – and bring your friends and family!

When: 6pm, Wednesday 13th February

Where: St Johns in the City, cnr Willis and Dixon Streets

Why: Because it's your chance to help build a better Wellington

## Sustainable Cities

Public Health Summer School, 26 February 2008, University of Otago, Wellington

A launch of a Centre for Sustainable Cities under the directorship of Professor Philippa Howden-Chapman will be held on 26 February at the Public Health Summer School.

To register and for further information please visit:

<http://www.wnmeds.ac.nz/academic/dph/index.html#summerschool>

## **Real Energy Review - A material world**

By: John Busby  
Date: 04-02-2008

Modern life has become dependent on the extraction of basic materials; mostly minerals from mines, both underground and open pit. In general the quantities of these produced has risen and, most believe, will continue to rise feeding universal economic growth. In recent years this comfortable state of consciousness, described perhaps as "business-as-usual" has prevailed. John Busby challenges the widely held conviction that modern technologies can outweigh the crippling cost of producing ever scarcer resources

Follow this link: [http://www.sandersresearch.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=1340](http://www.sandersresearch.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1340)

## **Peak Oil & New Zealand**

A View from the Top, Downunder  
A paper on Peak Oil and New Zealand.

**January 31, 2008**

Simon Tegg has written some really insightful documents on oil availability and pricing utilising latest research. They are now available on his website at [www.simontegg.wordpress.com](http://www.simontegg.wordpress.com)

Also check out:  
[Neat peak oil resources in one place.](#)

## **PLAN B 3.0: MOBILIZING TO SAVE CIVILIZATION**

<http://www.earth-policy.org/Books/PB3/index.htm>

"In late summer 2007, reports of ice melting were coming at a frenetic pace. Experts were 'stunned' when an area of Arctic sea ice almost twice the size of Britain disappeared in a single week," writes Lester R. Brown in his new book, Plan B 3.0: Mobilizing to Save Civilization (W.W. Norton & Company).

"Nearby, the Greenland ice sheet was melting so fast that huge chunks of ice weighing several billion tons were breaking off and sliding into the sea, triggering minor earthquakes," notes Brown, President and Founder of the Earth Policy Institute, a Washington, D.C.-based independent environmental research organization.

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“We need not go beyond ice melting to see that civilization is in trouble. Business-as-usual is no longer a viable option. It is time for Plan B,” Brown says in Plan B 3.0, which was produced with major funding from the Farview, Lannan, Summit, and Wallace Genetic foundations, the U.N. Population Fund, Fred and Alice Stanback, and Andrew Stevenson.....

<http://www.agoracosmopolitan.com/home/Frontpage/2008/01/12/02127.html>

## **Mitigating Climate Change through Organic Agriculture and Localized Food Systems**

Organic, sustainable agriculture that localize food systems has the potential to mitigate nearly thirty percent of global greenhouse gas emissions and save one-sixth of global energy use. Dr. Mae-Wan Ho and Lim Li Ching

Modern industrial agriculture of the “Green Revolution” contributes a great deal to climate change. It is the main source of the potent greenhouse gases nitrous oxide and methane; it is heavily dependent on the use of fossil fuels, and contributes to the loss of soil carbon to the atmosphere [1] (Feeding the World under Climate Change, SiS 24), especially through deforestation to make more land available for crops and plantations. Deforestation is predicted to accelerate as bio-energy crops are competing for land with food crops [2] (Biofuels: Biodevastation, Hunger & False Carbon Credits, SiS 33). But what makes our food system really unsustainable is the predominance of the globalised commodity trade that has resulted in the integration of the food supply chain and its concentration in the hands of a few transnational corporations. This greatly increases the carbon footprint and energy intensity of our food consumption, and at tremendous social and other environmental costs. A UK government report on food miles estimated the direct social, environmental, and economic costs of food transport at over £9 billion each year, which is 34 percent of the £26.2 billion food and drinks market in the UK [3] (Food Miles and Sustainability, SiS 28).

Consequently, there is much scope for mitigating climate change and reversing the damages through making agriculture and the food system as a whole sustainable, and this is corroborated by substantial scientific and empirical

evidence (see below). It is therefore rather astonishing that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change should fail to mention organic agriculture as a means of mitigating climate change in its latest 2007 report [4]; nor does it mention localising food systems and reducing long distance food transport [5].

Read the rest of this article here

<http://www.i-sis.org.uk/mitigatingClimateChange.php>

## **World's Rich Elite of Car and Jet Users Declare War On Billions of Human Beings.**

New Zealand is clearly part of that elite. If we weren't I wonder if it would make the headlines if multinational corporations decided to remove all of our 4.3 million people off this land and into some ghetto somewhere so they could grow biofuels on a larger scale here.

### **The Sustainability Principle of Energy**

“When a symbol use works to deny change it will materially alter the potential of the universe (energy) in a way that results in a reduction in the capacity of the symbol user to mirror reality. When a symbol use works for the acceptance of change it will increase the capacity of the symbol user to mirror reality.”

[http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/19/business/worldbusiness/19palmoil.html?pagewanted=1&\\_r=1&th&emc=th](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/19/business/worldbusiness/19palmoil.html?pagewanted=1&_r=1&th&emc=th)

### *The High Cost of Eating*

Articles in this series will examine growing demands on, and changes in, the world's production of food.

Farmers and plantation companies are responding to the higher prices, clearing hundreds of thousands of acres of tropical forest to replant with rows of oil palms. But an oil palm takes eight years to reach full production. A drought last year in Indonesia and flooding in Peninsular Malaysia helped constrain supply. Worldwide palm oil output climbed just 2.7 percent last year, to 42.1 million tons.

KUANTAN, [Malaysia](#) — Rising prices for cooking oil are forcing residents of

Asia's largest slum, in Mumbai, [India](#), to ration every drop. Bakeries in the United States are fretting over higher shortening costs. And here in Malaysia, brand-new factories built to convert vegetable oil into diesel sit idle, their owners unable to afford the raw material.

A PRECIOUS COMMODITY In Mumbai, Rajkanya Kawle, 11, held palm oil for her family's dinner. The 250 milliliters of oil cost 16 rupees, about 41 cents. [More Photos »](#)

This is the other oil shock. From India to Indiana, shortages and soaring prices for palm oil, soybean oil and many other types of vegetable oils are the latest, most striking example of a developing global problem: costly food.

The food price index of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the [United Nations](#), based on export prices for 60 internationally traded foodstuffs, climbed 37 percent last year. That was on top of a 14 percent increase in 2006, and the trend has accelerated this winter.

In some poor countries, desperation is taking hold. Just in the last week, protests have erupted in [Pakistan](#) over wheat shortages, and in Indonesia over soybean shortages. Egypt has banned rice exports to keep food at home, and China has put price controls on cooking oil, grain, meat, milk and eggs.

According to the F.A.O., food riots have erupted in recent months in Guinea, Mauritania, Mexico, Morocco, Senegal, Uzbekistan and Yemen.

"The urban poor, the rural landless and small and marginal farmers stand to lose," said He Changchui, the agency's chief representative for Asia and the Pacific.

A startling change is unfolding in the world's food markets. Soaring fuel prices have altered the equation for growing food and transporting it across the globe. Huge demand for biofuels has created tension between using land to produce fuel and using it for food.

A growing middle class in the developing world is demanding more protein, from pork and hamburgers to chicken and ice cream. And all this is happening even as global [climate change](#) may be starting to make it harder to grow food in some of the places best equipped to do so, like Australia.

In the last few years, world demand for crops and meat has been rising sharply. It remains an open question how and when the supply will catch up. For the foreseeable future, that probably means higher prices at the grocery store and fatter paychecks for farmers of major crops like corn, wheat and soybeans.

There may be worse inflation to come. Food experts say steep increases in commodity prices have not fully made their way to street stalls in the developing world or supermarkets in the West.

Governments in many poor countries have tried to respond by stepping up food subsidies, imposing or tightening price controls, restricting exports and cutting food import duties.

These temporary measures are already breaking down. Across Southeast Asia, for example, families have been hoarding palm oil. Smugglers have been bidding up prices as they move the oil from more subsidized markets, like Malaysia's, to less subsidized markets, like Singapore's.

No category of food prices has risen as quickly this winter as so-called edible oils — with sometimes tragic results. When a Carrefour store in Chongqing, China, announced a limited-time cooking oil promotion in November, a stampede of would-be buyers left 3 people dead and 31 injured.

Cooking oil may seem a trifling expense in the West. But in the developing world, cooking oil is an important source of calories and represents one of the biggest cash outlays for poor families, which grow much of their own food but have to buy oil in which to cook it.

Few crops illustrate the emerging problems in the global food chain as well as palm oil, a vital commodity in much of the world and particularly Asia. From jungles and street markets in Southeast Asia to food companies in the United States and biodiesel factories in Europe, soaring prices for the oil are drawing environmentalists, energy companies, consumers, indigenous peoples and governments into acrimonious disputes.

The oil palm is a stout-trunked tree with a spray of frilly fronds at the top that make it look like an enormous sea anemone. The trees, with their distinctive, star-like patterns of leaves, cover an eighth of the entire land area of Malaysia and even greater acreage in nearby Indonesia.

#### An Efficient Producer

The palm is a highly efficient producer of vegetable oil, squeezed from the tree's thick bunches of plum-size bright red fruit. An acre of oil palms yields as much oil as eight acres of soybeans, the main rival for oil palms; rapeseed, used to make canola oil, is a distant third. Among major crops, only sugar cane comes close to rivaling oil palms in calories of human food per acre.

Palm oil prices have jumped nearly 70 percent in the last year because supply has grown slowly while demand has soared.

At the same time, palm oil demand is growing steeply for a variety of reasons around the globe. They include shifting decisions among farmers about what to plant, rising consumer demand in China and India for edible oils, and Western subsidies for biofuel production.

American farmers have been planting more corn and less soy because demand for corn-based ethanol has pushed up corn prices. American soybean acreage plunged 19 percent last year, producing a drop in soybean oil output

and inventories.

Chinese farmers also cut back soybean acreage last year, as urban sprawl covered prime farmland and the Chinese government provided more incentives for grain.

Yet people in China are also consuming more oils. China not only was the world's biggest palm oil importer last year, holding steady at 5.2 million tons in the first 11 months of the year, but it also doubled its soybean oil imports to 2.9 million tons, forcing buyers elsewhere to switch to palm oil.

Concerns about nutrition used to hurt palm oil sales, but they are now starting to help. The oil was long regarded in the West as unhealthy, but it has become an attractive option to replace the chemically altered fats known as trans fats, which have lately come to be seen as the least healthy of all fats.

New York City banned trans fats in frying at food service establishments last summer and will ban them in bakery goods this summer. Across the country, manufacturers are trying to replace trans fats. American palm oil imports nearly doubled in the first 11 months of last year, rising by 200,000 tons.

"Four years ago, when this whole no-trans issue started, we processed no palm here," said Mark Weyland, a United States product manager for Lodders Croklaan, a Dutch company that supplies palm oil. "Now it's our biggest seller."

Last year, conversion of palm oil into fuel was a fast-growing source of demand, but in recent weeks, rising prices have thrown that business into turmoil.

Here on Malaysia's eastern shore, a series of 45-foot-high green and gray storage tanks connect to a labyrinth of yellow and silver pipes. The gleaming new refinery has the capacity to turn 116,000 tons a year of palm oil into 110,000 tons of a fuel called biodiesel, as well as valuable byproducts like glycerin. Mission Biofuels, an Australian company, finished the refinery last month and is working on an even larger factory next door at the base of a jungle hillside.

But prices have spiked so much that the company cannot cover all its costs and has idled the finished refinery while looking for a new strategy, such as asking a biodiesel buyer to pay a price linked to palm oil costs, and someday switching from palm oil to *jatropha*, a roadside weed.

"We took a view that palm oil prices were already high; we didn't think they could go even higher, and then they did," said Nathan Mahalingam, the company's managing director.

#### Growth in Biofuels

Biofuels accounted for almost half the increase in worldwide demand for vegetable oils last year, and represented 7 percent of total consumption of the

oils, according to Oil World, a forecasting service in Hamburg, Germany.

The growth of biodiesel, which can be mixed with regular diesel, has been controversial, not only because it competes with food uses of oil but also because of environmental concerns. European conservation groups have been warning that tropical forests are being leveled to make way for oil palm plantations, destroying habitat for orangutans and Sumatran rhinoceroses while also releasing greenhouse gases.

The [European Union](#) has moved to restrict imports of palm oil grown in unsustainable ways. The measure has incensed the Malaysian palm oil industry, which had plunged into biofuel production in part to satisfy European demand.

Another controversy involves the treatment of indigenous peoples whose lands have been seized by oil plantations. This has been a particular issue on Borneo.

"Finally, some of the pressures internationally have trickled down. Some of the companies are more open to dialogue; they want to talk to communities," said Ms. Lasimbang, a member of the Dusun indigenous group. "On our side, we are still suspicious."

### Demand Outstrips Supply

As the multiple conflicts and economic pressures associated with palm oil play out in the global economy, the bottom line seems to be that the world wants more of the oil than it can get.

Even in Malaysia, the center of the global palm oil industry for half a century, spot shortages have cropped up. Recently, as wholesale prices soared, cooking oil refiners complained of inadequate subsidies and cut back production of household oil, sold at low, regulated prices.

Street vendors in the capital, Kuala Lumpur, complain that they cannot find enough cooking oil to prepare roti canai, the flatbread that is the national snack. "It's very difficult; it's hard to find," said one vendor who gave only his first name, Palani, after admitting that he was secretly buying cooking oil intended for households instead of paying the much higher price for commercial use.

Many of the hardest-hit victims of rising food prices are in the vast slums that surround cities in poorer Asian nations. The Kawle family in Mumbai's sprawling Dharavi slum, a household of nine with just one member working as a laborer for \$60 a month, is coping with recent price increases



for palm oil.

The family has responded by eating fish once a week instead of twice, seldom cooking vegetables and cutting its monthly rice consumption. Next to go will be the weekly smidgen of lamb.

"If the prices go up again," said Janaron Kawle, the family patriarch, "we'll cut the mutton to twice a month and use less oil."

Contributing reporting were Andrew Martin in New York, Anand Giridharadas in Kale, India, and Michael Rubenstein in Mumbai.

## **Biofuel farms make CO2 emissions worse**

[Alok Jha](#), science correspondent

This article appeared in [the Guardian](#) on [Friday February 08 2008](#) on p14 of the [UK news](#) section.

Transforming ecosystems into farms for biofuel crops will increase global warming and result in net increases in carbon emissions, according to a new Science study. Scientists have found that converting rainforests, peatlands and grasslands can outweigh the carbon savings made from biofuels and produce "carbon debts" which could take centuries to pay off. The study will add to concerns about the ability of biofuels to replace fossil fuels. The EU is reviewing its pledge that biofuels such as bioethanol and biodiesel should make up 10% of transport fuel by 2020. Britain has a separate target of 5% biofuels in petrol and diesel by 2010. In the study, US researchers calculated that converting natural ecosystems to grow corn or sugarcane to produce ethanol, or palms or soybeans for biodiesel, could release between 17 and 420 times more carbon than the annual savings from replacing fossil fuels.

This is due to the carbon contained in the original plants and soils which is released as CO<sub>2</sub> when the vegetation rots after it is cleared. The researchers said this carbon debt must be paid before biofuels produced on the land could count towards reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

"This research examines the conversion of land for biofuels and asks the question 'Is it worth it?'" said Joe Fargione, a scientist for the environmental group The Nature Conservancy. "Does the carbon you lose by converting forests, grasslands and peatlands outweigh the carbon you 'save' by using biofuels instead of fossil fuels? And surprisingly, the answer is no."

In Indonesia the researchers found that converting land for palm oil production ran up the worst carbon debts, requiring 423 years to pay off. Producing soybeans in the Amazon would take 319 years of soy biodiesel to offset the carbon debt.

Stephen Polasky of the University of Minnesota, one of the authors of the study, published today in the journal *Science*, said: "We don't have proper incentives in place because landowners are rewarded for producing palm oil and other products but not rewarded for carbon management. This creates incentives for excessive land clearing and can result in large increases in carbon emissions."

Fargione said all biofuels now in use destroyed habitats. "Producing food-based biofuel will require that still more land be converted to agriculture," he said. The team also identified biofuels which did not contribute to global warming, including agricultural waste and grasses grown on land not suitable for crops.

"Biofuels made on perennial crops grown on degraded land that is no longer useful for growing food crops may actually help us fight global warming," said Jason Hill of the University of Minnesota, who also took part in the study. "One example is ethanol made from diverse mixtures of native prairie plants."

## **Organic Cuba without Fossil Fuels**

Cuba's experience has opened our eyes to agriculture without fossil fuels, a possibility rapidly turning into a necessity for mitigating climate change as world production of petroleum has also peaked. Dr. Mae-Wan Ho

Cuba 1989

Cuba is where agriculture without fossil fuels has been put to its greatest test, and it has passed with flying colours. The year 1989 ushered in the "Special Period" [1] a scenario that will hit some countries in the not too distant future unless they prepare for it right now.

Before 1989, Cuba was a model Green Revolution farm economy, based on huge production units of state-owned farms, and dependent on vast quantities of imported oil, chemicals and machinery to produce export crops. Under agreements with the former Soviet Union, Cuba had been an oil-driven country, and 98 percent of all its petroleum had come from the Soviet bloc. In 1988, 12-13 million tons of Soviet oil were imported and of this, Cubans re-exported two million tons. In 1989, Cuba was forced to cut the re-export in half and in 1990, oil exports were cut entirely as only 10 of 13m tons promised by the Soviet had been received. At the end of 1991, only 6 of the promised 13 m tons was received, and the short fall in oil began to severely affect the nation's economy.

While oil was critical, other losses were also important, as

