

The Dead Zone

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AKA: The Gulf Coast War

No, this is not about the popular TV series by the same name. Nor is it about the war in Iraq. This lens is about an area the size of Massachusetts which spreads across the Gulf Of Mexico (our country's gulf coast) from Texas to Florida. This area, dubbed "The Dead Zone" by biologists, is fed from the mighty Mississippi River system which drains the entire midsection of the country. From border to border and from the Rockies to the Appalachian Mountains ten states drain into the Mississippi River. This area is the country's bread belt and corn is the name of the game.

However, there is a giant defugalty lurking here. Corn is also feeding ever larger biofuel refineries as well our stomachs and between the two the price for corn has been driven upwards of 10\$/bushel. Here is the bad part. Corn needs lots of nitrogen and phosphorous to produce bumper crops, so the farmers are pouring these chemicals on, over ever larger numbers of acres. And these chemicals are leaking into, eventually, the Mississippi, and finally, the gulf coast waters. This industrial strength river of nitrogen and phosphorous is the ideal medium for the unchecked and explosive growth of an algae and bacterial bloom. A bloom so intense it draws all the oxygen out of the water. All the fish populations and marine life which used to call these warm waters home have been forced to relocate to be able to breathe.

Until the price of corn goes down it will never be a viable alternative energy resource. The price will not come down unless the production goes way up. If production goes way up, the chemical contamination of our rivers goes up and the gulf coast war goes into second gear. It seems this war on algae is doomed to failure before it even gets proper media exposure. Government wars, like the war on poverty, or the war on drugs, or the war in Iraq seem to be doomed to fail at every turn, but we still waste precious and monstrous amounts of our collective resources on them. Seems to me it is time the government gives up the waging of hopeless wars and the funding of bottomless pits and resumes doing what it does well. Remind me, what is that exactly?

I believe there may be a biological and economical use for the huge algae bloom. It is close to shore, and would appear to be as nourishing as say, for cows, corn silage or baled hay. I am looking into possible solutions (algae as biofuel?) and would appreciate any input from expert to novice. The solution to both increasing corn yields and decreasing fertilizer use could also involve some form of recycling. The runoff does seem to be ideal if it could be recirculated throughout the field irrigation system. Please forward any thoughts you may have on the subject.

About the Author

The environment is one of Bob's favorite passions. He grew up a country boy, with unlimited amounts of clean air and exercise. To think that in major metropolitan areas it is harmful to step outside your own controlled environment is distressing to the core. Exercise and deep cleansing breaths can shorten your life!

Source: <http://www.tntarticles.com>