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**VIEWPOINT: Biofuel money should be spent in Hawaii for Hawaii**

By LANCE HOLTER

News recently of a proposed \$61 million biodiesel refinery on Maui rippled across the islands (The Maui News, Feb. 18). BlueEarth Biofuels is seeking \$59 million from the Hawaii state Legislature by way of special purpose revenue bonds to build the project.

BlueEarth plans to produce biodiesel from imported palm oil and will import at least 40 million gallons per year. Importing oil? How does this create a sustainable local renewable energy economy? I thought we were trying to get away from this paradigm. Gee whiz, Mr. Wizard!

I did some research into palm oil and was awestruck by the devastation palm oil plantations are causing to the world's great tropical rain forests. Palm oil production is driving deforestation and cultural destruction in Africa, the Amazon, Central America, Indonesia, New Guinea, Malaysia, Borneo, Southeast Asia, and islands in other Asia Pacific regions.

Sixty million acres of palm oil plantations are planned for Malaysia and Indonesia alone because palm oil is in such demand.

Palm oil plantations using slash-and-burn and wetland-draining methods are the third-largest CO2 producer in the world, contributing 8 percent of all global CO2 emissions. Huge swaths of tropical forest have been illegally logged by the Indonesian military and sold to China. After the land is logged it is converted to palm oil plantations.

Palm oil is used for cooking and consumer products by companies like Proctor & Gamble. In fact palm oil is now found in one out of three food products. With the price of petroleum rising, palm oil biodiesel has become an alternative fuel.

The unsustainable destruction of the world's tropical rain forests will prove disastrous to valuable ecosystems required by plant communities, animals and people who depend upon the viability and economic benefits of intact watersheds, fisheries and

sustainable resource harvesting.

To put it bluntly, this idea that somehow sustainable palm oil can be produced is an erroneous one. All of the world's palm oil can or could be consumed by China. If you somehow find and take away the small amount of "sustainable oil," the unsustainably produced oil will just fill the void and cancel out the benefits.

Why does Maui need an unknown Mainland company with no track record, undisclosed or secret financial backers, subsidized by the state to produce quantities of biodiesel which are unsustainable through local production and which will always be dependent upon foreign oil imports?

I believe it far better to invest in our local Hawaii Pacific Biodiesel company and with Hawaii farmers who have proven accountability. We should invest this \$59 million into putting our own ag lands into biofuel oil seed crops.

Invest in research and in identifying the best sustainable oil seed crops for local harvest and production. Invest in the local community and keep the wealth for our island and state by not sending monies offshore, perpetuating environmentally destructive palm oil production.

For example, 600 workers were lost and unemployed on Oahu when Del Monte closed down. This was a lost opportunity when 600 experienced and trained agriculture workers could have been put to work producing sustainable, organically produced agricultural products. Our problem is that there is little or no current ongoing Hawaii-based biofuel research and crop studies under way in the field of biofuel seed-crop production.

The time has come for Hawaii to control its destiny and not be at the mercy of foreign oil imports and Mainland corporations who come to Maui and Hawaii with their hands out looking for our money. Let us invest in ourselves.

For more information, see [www.Biodiesel.org](http://www.Biodiesel.org), [www.rainforestweb.org](http://www.rainforestweb.org), [www.WWF.org](http://www.WWF.org) and [www.mongabay.com](http://www.mongabay.com).

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