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Results matter. That's an important concept in public policy, where intentions often matter far more. But fiscal responsibility means measuring how well a policy works.

At least, it should. It doesn't in the Environmental Protection Agency, which has now exempted itself from the requirement of showing whether biofuels help or hurt the environment.

"Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) officials are ignoring a federal law requiring them to report to Congress and the public whether biofuels are helping or harming the environment, a government watchdog reported Thursday," Ethan Barton wrote for the Daily Caller last week. "The Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS) program 'is a national policy that requires a certain volume of renewable fuel, also known as biofuel, to replace or reduce the quantity of petroleum-based transportation fuel,' EPA inspector general (IG) official Jim Kohler said in a podcast."

As Kohler explained, "It was created with the intent to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and expand the nation's renewable fuels sector while reducing reliance on imported oil."

But does it? Congress has no idea.

"The EPA never completed studies that would show whether biofuels are actually reducing greenhouse gases or otherwise helping the environment," Barton wrote. "Consequently, the EPA can't assess whether biofuels impact other environmental standards, such as air quality."

Fortunately, other agencies have studied the matter.

Growing evidence has shown ethanol isn't the green fuel we hoped for. Recently, a team of scientists report that, on balance, ethanol has been a net negative for the environment.

"A 10-year review of the US Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS) by researchers at the University of Tennessee (UT) found that the RFS is too reliant on corn ethanol, and the production of this biofuel is resulting in additional water and soil problems, as well as hampering advancements in other biofuels," the website Clean Technica reported in October. "Over the course of the last 10 years, corn ethanol has been lauded as being a bridge fuel solution that could reduce air pollution and increase national energy security in the U.S."

But corn-based ethanol hasn't lived up to the hype.

"Corn ethanol hasn't lived up to its promise as being a cleaner and more environmentally friendly fuel choice, even after an estimated \$50 billion in subsidies, in part because of some of the hidden costs of ethanol production, and this focus on corn ethanol has lead to a stagnated advanced biofuels industry, according to researchers," the website wrote.

To be more specific, ethanol doesn't reduce greenhouse gas emissions. That's because it takes tractors and other industrial processes to produce it.

"Academic studies have shown that (ethanol) could actually contribute to a sharp and overall increase of GHGs, and that ethanol production and use emits more particulate matter, ozone (as well as other smog precursors), and other air pollutants than gasoline," the report added.

No wonder the EPA isn't interested in studying the matter.

Ethanol and other biofuels are good politics - for Iowans and presidential hopefuls, mostly - not sound policy.

Congress must demand the EPA fulfill its requirement to produce these reports.

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