

REGIONAL PERCEPTIONS OF ETHANOL AS AN AUTOMOBILE FUEL ADDITIVE  
IN THE NORTHEAST, MIDWEST, AND CALIFORNIA

An Abstract of

A Thesis

Presented to the

Department of Geography

Western Illinois University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

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December, 2006

## ABSTRACT

Ethanol has recently become an issue of much political debate, due to increases in the price of crude oil and the ban on MTBE as a fuel enhancer in several states. As a result, media coverage of ethanol has increased. This research examines the role that regional geography plays in the way in which individuals perceive the use of ethanol as an automobile fuel additive in the Northeast, Midwest, and California. This study also analyzes the way in which issues of great debate, such as ethanol use, are portrayed in the news media.

The first part of the methodology uses random spatial sampling to select newspapers based on cities with population greater than 50,000 to best represent each region. Seven newspapers per region are then analyzed and ranked positive, neutral, or negative toward ethanol production and use. The second part of the methodology uses discourse analysis to deconstruct the arguments for and against ethanol, looking at the differences between the Northeast, Midwest and California. The data are articles from the last five years, from 3 newspapers, the top circulation newspaper from each focus region.

The findings suggest that regional geography does play a role in the way ethanol production and use is both perceived and portrayed in the news media. This study has shown that the ongoing ethanol debate is both regional and political and that location in the United States does have an influence on the viewpoints that exist toward ethanol as an automobile fuel additive, with a direct correlation between distance to ethanol production and the resulting viewpoint toward ethanol use. Surrounding natural and physical environment play a vital role in the way individuals perceive ethanol's benefits or ills.