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**JUNE 15, 2007**

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## **Perennial Crops Key to Bioeconomy's Future, Science Article**

*Researchers Find Advantages for Farmers and the Environment*

MINNEAPOLIS — Government policies that support an expansion of perennial energy crops for the new bioeconomy will help diversify Midwest farms and bring a series of economic and environmental benefits, according to an article published in the June 15 edition of *Science*.

“Perennial cropping systems are more resilient because they improve soil and water quality and are better able to deal with climate change. A stronger cropping system will bring economic rewards for farmers while benefiting the environment,” said Mark Muller, Director of the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy’s Environment and Agriculture Program, and co-author of the article. IATP Senior Fellow Dr. Dennis Keeney also was a co-author of the article.

“Sustainable Development of the Agricultural Bioeconomy,” led by Nick Jordan, a professor of agroecology at the University of Minnesota, concluded that many of the environmental problems in agriculture are associated with commodity program crops (particularly corn and soybeans), including the degradation of water quality with sediment, nutrients and pesticides, disruption of wildlife habitat, emission of greenhouse gases and degradation of air quality.

Current farm programs on environmental quality mainly subsidize the retirement of land from production, but there are limits to this approach, according to the article. The authors propose a system that jointly produces agricultural commodities and provides environmental benefits.

“21st Century agriculture will need to use more perennial-based systems for the next generation of plastics, building materials, and energy products,” said Muller. “Farm policies should encourage this transition to safer production systems and a more prosperous agricultural economy.”

The authors propose a \$20 million annual federal investment in the 2007 Farm Bill to look at policy approaches to compensate farmers for the production of environmental benefits in growing perennial energy grasses. The authors also proposed a network of research and demonstration projects to evaluate projects for biomass production for the bioeconomy.

The study team came together as part of an effort called Green Lands, Blue Waters, a consortium of Land Grant Universities and non-governmental organizations in the Mississippi River Basin. IATP is a founding member of Green Lands, Blue Waters.

The full article (sub required) is online, visit: <http://www.sciencemag.org/magazine.dtl>.

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