

Preface

This book examines recent developments in biofuel production in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) region. Taking “sustainable development” as a central theme, most chapters consider one country in the region and explore how biofuel production is evolving given concerns about food sovereignty, trade, other social issues, and environmental conservation as well as an increasingly complex and globalized economic structure. An additional chapter addresses sustainability governance and certification schemes in the LAC region.

The countries included in the collection are diverse and include Brazil (two chapters), the region’s largest and most established biofuel producer, and Argentina, which has embraced soy-based biodiesel exports as the newest component of its well-established agro-industrial complex. Smaller “up-and-coming” biofuel producers such as Colombia, which has turned to palm oil-based biodiesel for a complex mix of reasons including an attempt to provide rural farmers in coca-growing regions with an alternative crop, are also included. We also consider Peru and Mexico, minor biofuel producers that nevertheless makes for very interesting cases for examining biofuel sustainability. Mexico, for example, was the site of the “tortilla riots” of January 2007, which was in protest of maize price spikes induced in part by US biofuel policies. Those riots proved to be the first salvo in the ongoing battle of “food vs. fuel,” an issue that stands at the heart of biofuel sustainability. Last, we address Guatemala and the Caribbean region more broadly as case studies, since many smaller nations in this region have embraced biofuel production, albeit in quite different ways. For example, Jamaica, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Trinidad and Tobago, and the US Virgin Islands all take advantage of US free trade agreements to act as conduits of Brazilian ethanol, importing it in a hydrous form and dewatering it before exporting it to the USA, tax free. However, others like Guatemala have developed their own sugarcane-based ethanol industries, primarily for export, and Guatemala is the most efficient and dominant producer in Central America. Similarly, the region hosts numerous small-scale efforts to develop oilseed-based biodiesel industries, based on soy and alternative feedstock such as *Jatropha curcas*, which are explored in some detail.

The contributions to this book critically explore the ways in which biofuel production in Latin America affect social, economic, and environmental systems: the

so-called “three pillars of sustainability”. Numerous stakeholders, drawn from government, industry, civil society, and academia have attempted to define “Sustainable Development” in the context of biofuel production and to operationalize it through a series of principles, criteria, and highly specific indicators. Nevertheless, it remains a fluid and contested concept with deep political and social ramifications, which each chapter explores in detail.

We would like to thank the U.S. National Science Foundation for partial support in writing this book under Award Number 1105039, “OISE-PIRE Sustainability, Ecosystem Services, and Bioenergy Development Across the Americas.” In addition, several people provided valuable comments on drafts of one or more chapters of this book. We would like to especially thank Alberto Acevedo, Marcus Finco, Marcia de Moraes, Pablo Pacheco, Rodrigo Pinto, Pete Richards, Matt Rudolf, and Damiana Serafini for their helpful comments. Any remaining errors or omissions are those of the authors alone.

Sustainable Development of Biofuels in Latin America
and the Caribbean

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2014, XII, 252 p. 42 illus., 24 illus. in color., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-1-4614-9274-0