

The green lobby: is it killing the planet?

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Avian mortalities, blights on the landscape and noise pollution are just a few of the negative consequences of supposedly greener energy solutions. Gabrielle Pickard for RT asks if the actions of environmentalists are doing more harm than good in their quest to save the planet.

Biofuels expert Jan Van Atken once said: "There is more to the environment than climate change". The planet's changing climate is of course an urgent issue but the repercussions and negative impact of renewable energy sources are sometimes overlooked.

Wind farms are perhaps the most widely contested of the renewable types of energy because of their association with noise pollution and ruining the landscape. They are often referred to as "eyesores" and "blights on the horizon". But what is arguably a more worrying effect caused by wind turbines is the large numbers of birds that are being destroyed by colliding into these tall, man-made structures of steel.

Aptly named bird-strike, critics believe the increasing number of wind farms that are sprouting up throughout the world are having a detrimental effect on bird populations. Professor John Powell, an expert in avian studies, suggests most of the research on the subject describes the consequences of bird-strike rather than addresses the causes.

"More study has to be done to assess the impact of wind farms on bird, bat and small mammal populations," he says.

Organic farming is a purportedly more "natural" method of farming and is generally commended by environmental experts for its lack of pesticides and herbicides that have been proven to have a detrimental effect on the environment. But there are some critics who believe that the negative effects of organic farming far outweigh the benefits.

Organic food is marketed as being more environmentally friendly than conventional food. This is usually why organic food is more expensive. Critics of organic farming emphasise the fact that organic foods may be attractive to the wealthier consumer but they will not feed the world. Non-organic farming techniques yield more products than organic farms, allowing critics to conclude that organic farming is inefficient and unable to produce the amount of food needed to match the current amount of farming outputs.

The amount of land organic farms require also needs to be considered. Twice as much land is needed to grow organic food than it is to grow non-organic produce. Whilst some aspects of more natural farming techniques may be advantageous in the quest to turn the planet greener, the excessive amount of land that would be required to turn all farms organic makes it neither a viable or permanent solution.

33-year-old Stephen Halloway is a regular consumer at Sainsbury's supermarket and is averse to buying organic produce.

"The cost of fruit and vegetables are high enough these days so there is no way the average consumer can afford to go organic," he said. "Whilst no method of farming is perfect, organic farmers need to bring their prices down if they realistically want to compete for the public's money".

Both the manufacturing of renewable energy sources and the disturbance of habitats they cause are negative aspects of environmentally friendly energy methods which are often dismissed. The manufacturing process of vast solar farms is not only extremely expensive but is not without chemical waste and by-products. A lot of concrete is used to build these man-made objects and concrete is a very polluting substance.

Hydro-electric power disrupts the natural flow of rivers and affects the quality of the water downstream as well as the surrounding environment. Hydro-electric power stations are not only expensive to build, when a river is dammed, it floods the surrounding area, affecting plant, animal and human habitats. Chris Whitehead, a keen follower of environmental issues, admits there are problems with alternative energy sources but thinks there are few alternatives.

He said: "There is a visual downside, chemical waste and destroyed habitats, but I find it acceptable given the oil and coal alternatives which are even worse".

The dark side of biofuel has come under scrutiny recently with reports suggesting that the benefits may be offset by serious environmental problems and increased food prices for the hungry. The apprehension was described in a report by U.N Energy which stated: "Soaring palm oil demand has already led to the clearing of tropical forests in southeast Asia".

And as biofuel expert Jan Van Atken noted: "You cannot fight climate change by large deforestation in Indonesia".

The downsides of allegedly greener methods stretch much further than merely aesthetic objections. Ironically, supposedly environmentally friendlier solutions are causing destruction of wildlife and natural environments. Because of these negative aspects there are justifiable doubts to unconventional alternative methods being a global solution. Perhaps governments need to channel their energies to craft cleaner and greener policies that maximise potential but minimise the negative implications associated with attempting to save the planet.

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