

ARIZONA REPUBLIC

'Fuel'

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The slick documentary "Fuel" is the unofficial sequel to Al Gore's "An Inconvenient Truth." Besides global warming, it adds toxic waste and Mideast bloodshed to the indictment against our "addiction to oil," but spends more of its time discussing solutions.

One solution in particular: biodiesel, which has been the personal crusade of activist Josh Tickell, who also is the film's director and "star." In the '90s, Tickell crisscrossed the country in his Veggie Van, towing a Green Grease Machine that converted vegetable oil from fast-food fryers into fuel.

Tickell has gone out of his way to make his environmental sermon watchable, with colorful cinematography, spiffy graphics, celebrities - Julia Roberts, Sheryl Crow and Willie Nelson - and left-wing intellectuals, including Naomi Klein and Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

The broad outline of the argument is pretty familiar, and it's unlikely to convince anyone who doesn't already accept the core premise: that our petroleum-based economy is unsustainable and endangers our national security and the planet itself. But there are many interesting facts here. For example, "biodiesel" isn't an innovation at all: The original diesel engine ran on peanut oil. And did you know that Henry Ford built an ethanol infrastructure for his cars that was shattered, not by market competition from gasoline but by Prohibition?

Tickell gets points for intellectual honesty for directly addressing critics who are concerned that increased use of biofuels will impact the global food supply, possibly pricing poor countries out of the market for such staples as corn. He doesn't dismiss the argument but offers some next-generation technological solutions, from algae farms in the desert to "vertical farms" in the cities.

The utopia he envisions couldn't be as easy to achieve as his motivational film implies. But it's worth thinking about.

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