Ethanol is a fuel made from fermented corn, and the so-called Corn Belt is to ethanol what Texas is to oil. Just six states — Iowa, Nebraska, Illinois, Minnesota, Indiana, and South Dakota — account for 265 million barrels of ethanol fuel production, compared to around 100 million barrels for the other 44 states combined.

Ethanol has been touted as a means for promoting national energy security. But production is concentrated in just a few states.

While ethanol makes up about 10 percent of the content of motor fuel sold in the U.S., it seems unlikely that liquid biofuels will ultimately play more than a niche role in the national energy system.

The debate as to the merits of ethanol as a suitable alternative to gasoline has not been settled. Regardless, the production of ethanol has stalled after a decade of rapid growth, hovering around 1 million barrels a day for the past five years.