Elisabeth Robson

In a Feb 20, 2025 Seattle Times article, the journalist (Dominic Gates) defines "sustainable aviation fuel" as: "Sustainable aviation fuel, or SAF, is jet fuel made from sustainable resources that can be mixed with fossil jet fuel to reduce life-cycle carbon emissions from aircraft."

But nowhere does Gates say what "sustainable resources" are used to make "sustainable aviation fuel." So let's find out.

A quick search on the company named in the article, SkyNRG, that proposes making this fuel here in Washington State, pops up their description of the "sustainable resources" used to make "sustainable aviation fuel" (SAF): "forestry and agricultural waste, used cooking oil, carbon captured from the air, and green hydrogen." They describe in the next paragraph that SAF is more sustainable because it "emits the same amount of carbon to the atmosphere as was previously absorbed by its feedstock." (Note a key part here: burning SAF emits carbon.)

I should pause here to point out that "sustainable" means "able to be maintained at a certain rate or level." So when the company says "sustainable resources" they mean they can continue to use these resources indefinitely to make "sustainable aviation fuel," meaning they can continue their business indefinitely.

Okay, so let's take a look at these feedstocks used to make SAF. Forestry waste exists because the forestry industry exists. In nature, there is no "waste" when a tree falls down; the tree lies on the ground and begins to rot. In the process it provides food and a home to countless species from moss, to young trees, to bugs of all kinds, to woodpeckers, salamanders, lizards, possums, and more. But forestry waste, also called "slash," is the leftovers from logging, an inherently unsustainable practice. Why is it unsustainable? Two primary reasons (although there are many more): first, by logging and then removing trees and slash, logging companies remove the vital biomass that supplies the nutrients for the next generation of trees, so the soil is heavily degraded each time the area is logged. Second is that "trees" does not equal "forests"; monocrops of young trees does not equal old-growth mixed forests.

So, forestry waste is not sustainable in any way. Over time, the land will become less able to grow trees (or much of anything else), and forestry waste is only available as long as we continue the ecocidal practice of logging large quantities of trees, logging which, along with killing the trees themselves, is destroying biodiversity and involves the use of toxic chemicals with which we are poisoning ourselves and the planet.

Agriculture waste is similarly unsustainable, because agriculture is unsustainable. I'll guess it is industrial agriculture, not organic gardens in our backyards, that supplies the agriculture waste to this company. Industrial agriculture is one of the most destructive, unsustainable practices we humans participate in. It is responsible for the vast majority of habitat loss and wildlife loss, including huge areas of deforestation. Industrial agriculture relies on massive quantities of fertilizers (made from fossil fuels), pesticides and herbicides (which are helping to poison the planet, and are also made with fossil fuels). Industrial agriculture strips the Earth down to dead fields of dirt, which are then doused in chemicals and planted with one crop—a poisonous food desert to all living beings, including to us. What is grown there is then heavily processed and turned

into food-like substances that are giving us cancer, diabetes, and heart disease.

So, agriculture waste is not sustainable in any way either.

You might be tiring of my analysis at this point. So I'll speed things up. "Cooking oil, carbon captured from the air, and green hydrogen" is next on the list. Cooking oil generally requires industrial agriculture, so, bzzzt, not sustainable. Carbon captured from the air requires massive amounts of energy, along with chemicals, and large factories; bzzzt, not sustainable. Green hydrogen... well the key is in the word "green." Typically the EROEI of hydrogen as an energy carrier is less than 1, which means, bzzzt, not sustainable!

Now let's move on to "renewable diesel production." This will, according to the article, be made from "biogenic methane, using waste from municipal landfills, sewage treatment facilities, and manure from animal farms." Oh boy. Anyone who thinks this is "renewable diesel production" is delusional.

Surely by now you don't need an in-depth explanation of why any of these things are so not sustainable. Quickly, though: if waste from municipal landfills is "sustainable" that means it will be available indefinitely, which means we'll be filling up landfills indefinitely. Bzzzt, not sustainable (endless consumption on a finite planet and all).

Using methane from sewage treatment facilities requires massive amounts of sewage from overpopulated, unsustainable cities.

Using manure from animal farms (a nice way of saying factory farms, also known as Concentrated Animal Feedlot Operations, or CAFOs) assumes that CAFOs can continue indefinitely. Recent "culling" (read "killing") of millions of cows and chickens due to H5N1 spread primarily through crowded conditions in CAFOs, demonstrates that factory farms are anything but sustainable. Growing the feed for these animals requires industrial agriculture; bzzt, not sustainable. The waste generated by CAFOs is poisoning ground water, lakes, and rivers and causing massive dead zones in bays; bzzzt, not sustainable!

I think (hope?) I've shown that making "sustainable aviation fuel" is anything but sustainable. And we haven't even talked about the flying yet.

Manufacturing SAF assumes there will be jet fuel (made from fossil fuels) to mix it with, and planes to put it in. Is jet fuel sustainable? No, because fossil fuels are a non-renewable resource that will eventually run out. Is making planes and flying them sustainable? No, because making planes requires industry that is completely reliant on fossil fuels, chemicals, metals, mines, refineries, factories... you get the picture. Flying planes emits CO2. (Remember that the company says their SAF emits CO2 when it's burned.) We all surely know emitting more CO2 is not sustainable; climate change (along with habitat loss, wildlife loss, and pollution all of which I've mentioned above) will soon cause this ecocidal way of life to collapse. Flying planes also requires runways, airports, cars and buses to get to those airports; cities, air traffic controllers (I heard some of them were fired recently or are working without pay), among many other things, and is partly responsible for spreading pandemics around the world. Flying is in no way "sustainable."

We cannot in any true sense of the word make aviation "sustainable". I urge you to say no to all

sustainable aviation fuel projects.

Thank you.