

# Gasohol Can't Compete as Auto Fuel

IT IS possible to make alcohol from grain, blend it with gasoline, and make a satisfactory motor vehicle fuel called gasohol.

This was done during the petroleum crisis a few years ago, when conversion plants were subsidized by the government and gasohol products were partially exempt from federal and state fuel taxes.

When subsidies were withdrawn most of the conversion plants were shut down and when tax exemptions expired gasohol prices soared above those for gasoline. Most motorists wouldn't pay the difference.

When grain surpluses piled up in the 1920s and 1930s the idea of making fuel from wheat and corn was advanced. Grains wouldn't bring \$1 a bushel on the market, but the plan flopped. Farmers say they lose money now growing wheat to sell for \$3.50 to \$4.00 a bushel.

There is just one reason why we don't run our cars and trucks on gasohol. That is what it costs to plow the land, plant a crop, fertilize it, pray for rain, harvest the crop, haul it to market, transport it to a

conversion plant, process it, and deliver it to consumers.

Gasohol up to this point has not proved to be competitive. If it yielded substantially more miles per gallon or cost substantially less than gasoline, gasohol probably would be in demand.

A national publication called Spotlight recently published a yarn about an Idaho farm couple who are making their own fuel.

Alvin and Dale Snipes built their conversion still in their living room but take it outside to use it "so we don't burn a hole in our floor." They said three tons of wheat produce 264 gallons of high grade ethanol fuel, and Jerusalem artichokes 760 gallons per acre.

They reported 30 miles per gallon from this fuel, about the same as they got with gasoline. Compensation for their time and labor seemed to be in what they described as "high protein health food flour" derived as a by-product of the grain residues.

Six years ago Farmland Industries, one of the nation's largest

farmer-owned cooperatives, investigated the feasibility of turning surplus grain into fuel. This co-op's members grow vast quantities of wheat and corn, operate grain marketing facilities, own oil wells and refineries.

At that time the board of directors announced that the process wouldn't pay. This was before the government got into synfuels with a multibillion dollar program that didn't pay out.

Unquestionably, farmers could convert part of their grain into ethanol for vehicle fuel, but there is no certainty they would come out ahead if all costs are counted. Commercial processors can't pay profitable prices to grain producers and turn out a product that will be competitive with gasoline, even at today's prices.

The Good Lord arranged for petroleum to be found beneath the earth, conveniently at the time automobiles and airplanes were being invented. Perhaps if this resource becomes depleted another source of energy may be revealed for vehicles of the 21st century.