Potato Salad & Algae

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One of the things I look forward to the most about the pending Fourth of July festivities is the wonderful combination of my dad's grilled brats and my mom's potato salad. This perfect storm of smells and flavors, washed down by a couple of cold well-brewed beverages, seems to relax me to a point in which I can actually feel any extra burden drop from my shoulders. Throw in a Brewers baseball game on the radio or TV, maybe some cards after supper, and life couldn't be much better. Even more enjoyable is that my daughters seem to like the ingredients of this Independence Day celebration as much as I do.

Now, these rewards don't come without some investment. There's the two hours-plus of roundtrip driving that not only requires filling up the tank, but also entails the same Scooby-Doo DVD playing as a soundtrack for the way to and from my parent's home. Making sure that I've got the appropriate outdoor resources for my girls is also required. And finally, there's indulging in the equally appreciated, yet semi-annoying queries related to my personal and professional life from friends and family.

At the end of the day, however, the ends more than justify the means ... especially when I figure in the potential for a take-home bag of leftovers and, of course, the intangible benefits of time spent with those closest to you.

It's a dynamic not unrelated to successful alternative energy endeavors.

We all know the problems. Whether it's the pollution and dangers associated with coal, the political issues surrounding a dependence on foreign oil or the simple fact that fossil fuels are a non-renewable resource, what's unique in the energy equation is that we do know about some of the possible solutions. What remains to be seen is

the level of investment that we're prepared to make.

Similar to the combination of brats, beer, potato salad and family that allow my Independence Day celebration to make such a positive impact, so is the answer to our future energy needs. It will not solely be developments in wind and solar energy harvesting, or the development of new feedstocks like biomass and algae. Rather, all of these outlets need to be investigated and resources should continue to be invested.

Although it can seem frustrating to dedicate funds towards outlets that offer an uncertain result, these measures need to be taken and continued. While methanol production and geothermal energy have now been placed on the backburner, the time and energy spent investigating these outlets showed us what the next step could and should be in the development of better energy sources. More importantly, continuing to dedicate resources to new energy technology allows us to take the next step in making them practical from a usage and cost perspective.

Embedding these functionalities can also generate new revenue sources and stimulate job growth — two key elements for an economy that is currently struggling and will always demand strong production capabilities in order to thrive in a global economy. While passenger car manufacturing can easily be outsourced, energy used here needs to be managed here.

I know that we still have oil. And I know that we're still a long way from making wind and solar energy production profitable. I don't have my own personal algae pond and production lab.

But I also know that my dad undercooked his very first batch of brats and that my mom (please don't tell her) used to put way too much mayo in the potato salad. Over time, however, the right investments have paid significant dividends for my Fourth of July feast. Similarly, continuing to invest our time and resources in alternative energy sources will leave a better taste in everyone's mouth going forward.

What's your take? Sound off by e-mailing me at jeff.reinke@advantagemedia.com [1].

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