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## Scientists, public talk about biofuels

By [Justin Myers](#)

April 4, 2008

The causes of rising gas prices, where to plant oranges in Brazil and exactly how sugar can explode were just a few of the topics participants discussed Tuesday evening at the Cherry Street Artisan, where the Life Sciences Center held Columbia's first science café event.

Life Sciences Center Director Jack Schultz led the discussion, which focused on the benefits and potential problems of using ethanol and other biofuels, or biologically derived energy sources.

Science café events, which are independently organized around the world, aim to make science and scientists more accessible to members of the public.

Schultz said Columbia is particularly suited to host such discussions.

"We live in a town with a world-class resource in terms of people who know things," he said.

Schultz said it is important to increase public awareness of science through events like the café discussion, which does not require participants to have any scientific background.

"We think it's important for anyone to have an understanding of how science works because you're confronted with it every day," he said.

MU chemistry professor Rainer Glaser said he was pleased with the event.

"This was awesome," he said. "It went very well. You've got to start somewhere, and this was a wonderful start."

Steve Borgelt, an associate professor of biological engineering at MU, said such discussions are important because of how pervasive and important science is to society.

"I'm glad to see this kind of conversation going," Borgelt said.

Schultz said additional science café events will be held on the first Tuesday of



Photo/Sean Church

Bond Life Sciences Center Director Jack C. Schultz illustrates the interconnectedness of the world's ecosystems. Schultz sponsored Columbia's first Science Café on Tuesday night at the Cherry Street Artisan where local and visiting scientists discussed biofuels.

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every month at the Artisan.

He said next month's topic is not yet known, and participants were encouraged to suggest possible topics.

"It's for you to drive," he said. "Your ideas are the ones that we'll pursue."

As participants become more comfortable at the events, Schultz said he hopes to keep future speakers' presentations shorter to allow more time for conversation.

"I'd like to work this out so that I don't talk so much or the speaker doesn't talk so much," he said.

Glaser said he believes events like Tuesday's discussion are critical to changing the public's attitude toward science.

"I think change comes around from personal interaction," he said, "And you don't have to have change very fast with a lot of people. You have to have it with a few people, but really engaging — convince them to change their behavior."

Schultz said he hopes the café events' nonthreatening atmosphere will attract more participants in much the same way as MU's Saturday Morning Science lecture series, which also does not require attendees to have any scientific background.

"I think we're going to have greatly overlapping audiences, although I kind of hope that we'll capture a broader audience here than we would there," he said.

Schultz ended the event by saying how important it is for scientists and members of the public to interact with each other and understand each other's point of view.

"The broader issue is a public appreciation of science," he said. "The public everywhere, including Missouri, tends to not connect well with science in large part because there isn't a comfortable, easy-to-understand way to do that. We're trying to provide an easy, accessible, understandable way to talk about science in a way that's not threatening."

Glaser said the accessibility of scientists is important to increasing that understanding.

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