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With shortages of fossil energy, especially oil and natural gas, and heavy biomass energy use occurring in both developed and developing countries, a major focus has developed worldwide on renewable energy systems. Renewable energy systems include wind power, biomass, photovoltaics, hydropower, solar thermal, thermal ponds, and biogas.

Currently, a heavy focus is on biofuels made from crops, such as corn, sugarcane, and soybeans, for use as renewable energy sources. Wood and crop residues also are being used as fuel. Though it may seem beneficial to use renewable plant materials for biofuel, the use of crop residues and other biomass for biofuels raises many concerns about major environmental problems, including food shortages and serious destruction of vital soil resources.