

Press release

Plenty space for biofuels in Europe

Second generation should make the difference

Petten, 14 maart 2008.

The EU biofuels target for 2020 can be met with conventional feedstocks and current technology without major agricultural land use changes and environmental consequences. Yet, only advanced, second-generation biofuels are expected to provide a substantial contribution to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and increasing energy security. The introduction of these advanced biofuels requires supporting measures on several policy levels. These are the key conclusions of the REFUEL project, commissioned by the EU's Intelligent Energy Europe programme. The project present its final Biofuels Road Map document on March 14 in Brussels.

Biofuels potential can become available without compromising food and feed supply. Furthermore, it does not require conversion of forestland, grassland and nature conservation areas into arable land. The latter is essential since recent studies indicate that such land use changes may lead to losses of soil carbon that would turn any greenhouse gas emission reductions into net increases of emissions. In the new EU member states and Ukraine, agriculture has ample opportunities for increasing crop and livestock yields, thereby freeing up agricultural land for biofuel feedstocks cultivation.

Benefits

The EU's 10% target for biofuels by 2020 can be met by domestic production of conventional, first-generation biofuels, and moderate imports. However, advanced, or second-generation biofuels would result in more climate benefits. These biofuels, produced from residues and woody or grassy plants, show substantially higher yields per hectare of land, and provide far better opportunities for the EU industry to develop an innovative sector. Any biofuels policy promoting these benefits leads to improved opportunities for second-generation biofuels, the REFUEL analyses show. In comparison, conventional biofuels (biodiesel from oil crops and bioethanol from sugar crops, cereals) perform less adequately on these most commonly used arguments for increasing biofuels use.

Hurdles

However, for advanced biofuels to enter the market, various obstacles will need to be tackled. Required production technology needs to be further developed and deployed, as well as new supply chains for agricultural and forestry residues and crops. Overcoming these hurdles will require a favourable and stable investment climate. Furthermore, REFUEL shows that cross-sector strategies can help reduce these barriers. Examples are the initial development of biomass supply chains for power generation, or integration of biofuel plants in district heating systems. In this context, the role of the Central and Eastern European countries will be pivotal, as this region has most of the feedstock potential.

The two-year project is coordinated by the Energy Research Centre of the Netherlands, and implemented by a consortium of seven European institutes with different disciplinary backgrounds. The team officially present the final road map document in a press conference on March 14, during the World Biofuel Markets conference in Brussels.