

Biofuel issues in the new legislation on the promotion of renewable energy

Public consultation exercise, April – May 2007

How should a biofuel sustainability system be designed?

Greenhouse gas emission savings are forming the most important challenge at the moment. Therefore the major subject of a biofuel sustainability system should be the question of how to achieve a high level of greenhouse gas emission savings and not the question of how to define “first- or second-generation biofuels”.

Concerning the greenhouse gas emission savings it obviously does not matter what kind of technology was used when producing the biofuel. Also the use of a certain type of raw material (e.g. cellulosic material) does not necessarily result in greenhouse gas emission savings-efficiency.

Aim of the sustainability system should be the efficient use of the entire potential of all raw materials available. This includes cellulosic materials, but also all types of agricultural by-products.

Especially biofuels produced from animal-by-products and by-products originating from the food and drink industry (e.g. animal fat and used cooking oil) show very good results with respect to the greenhouse gas emission savings and are meeting the sustainability criterion at the same time because these materials are available without any negative effect on the land use. For this reason the use of agricultural by-products as an important source for the sustainable production of biofuels should be promoted in all EU-member states according to EU-policy.

With respect to the high importance of facing the problem of climatic change the question of the impact on other users who compete for the same raw material is of secondary importance. It is true that e.g. the oleochemical industry is using animal fats as a raw material and is now facing competition concerning the access to the raw material. On the other hand this industry was always competing with others (e.g. feed producers) concerning the use of animal fats, except in recent years when a ban on animal fat usage for feed purposes in some countries was imposed in the context of the BSE-crisis.

It is only since then that the oleochemical industry can take advantage of almost exclusive access to this material. As a result nowadays the oleochemical industry can buy animal fats at prices which are far from representing the energetic value of this material. We have to realize that animal fats are a commodity like others and therefore nobody can proclaim an exclusive right to use it.

Certainly the oleochemical industry will be welcome as a further client of the fat producing industry but at a price that should at least represent the energetic value of animal by-products.

It is true that as an effect prices for this raw material might rise. On the other hand this gives added value to the European agriculture so that the use of animal fat will not only achieve the most value from an environmental but also from an economic point of view.

At the same time it is important to keep in mind that biodiesel originating from this material is one of the most efficient biofuels available at present in terms of life cycle assessment. As it is a by-product of the food-production and not especially produced for energy use, biofuel produced from this material in some countries (e.g. Denmark) is even acknowledged as “second generation”.
