Evaluation of the pellets@las hotline
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1. Introduction

Within the pellets@las project, hotline services for pellet market participants were offered. Six pellets@las partners (FORCE, HFA, WIP, BAPE, NEF, ADEME) offered phone numbers of experts via the project website.

These hotlines were meant as an additional source of information for pellet actors looking for latest news on pellet markets and the project. It targeted all pellet actors, including traders and end-consumers.

The major aims of this task were:

- To provide national contact points to pellet actors across Europe;
- To provide further guidance on the utilization of gathered data;
- To provide personal consulting to market participants;
- To spread information on pellets in general;
- To establish a platform facilitating contacts between market actors;
- To generally increase the impact of the project.

The objective mentioned in the work programme was to handle at least 500 requests for information within project lifetime.

2. Pellet hotline experiences

2.1. Germany (WIP)

In total, around 150 individual contacts with the German hotline were recorded. The number of German contacts was relatively low due to the existence of established industry contact points in Germany (e.g. the German pellet industry association).

Three main types of contacts can be distinguished:

- Pellet producers, biomass traders or interested investors (or their consultants) from several European countries;
- Universities and other research organisations;
- Industry stakeholders from outside Europe, interested in exporting pellets to Europe.

Most of the contacts had further questions on the European markets. Most frequently, companies asked for general information and assistance in finding trade contacts in Europe. Most of the requests were answered by referring to related information provided at the pellets@las homepage or by referring to contacts with special expertise.

2.2. Austria (HFA)

In the course of the project duration about 120 hotline contacts (via telephone or email) were registered at HFA.
The callers could be identified mostly as business people, namely traders or producers either already working in the pellet business or planning to start working in this field. About 10% of the contacts can be classified as private people or students. Most questions concerned technical aspects of pellets and pellet production, like:

- Heating value
- Possibilities of analysis
- Ash odor of pellets
- Additives
- Self-ignition during storage
- Start-up of a pellet plant

Another subject area was standards, standardization and certification of pellets. Only a minor amount of questions concerned markets and market data. For some callers the purpose of the call was to get information concerning possible business contacts.

Mainly the inquiries came from German speaking countries (AT, DE and CH) but contacts were also registered from BG, RO, IT and ES.

2.3. United Kingdom (NEF)

Between January 2007 and end of December 2009, the National Energy Foundation handled 180 recorded Hot Line enquiries, made both by telephone and e-mail. Enquiries came mainly from within the UK and Europe and ranged from would be investors and pellet producers seeking to establish the size of the existing wood pellet market in the UK, to technical questions from pellet producers wanting to know how they can reduce the ash content of their pellets and where to get them tested.

2.4. Poland (BAPE)

Most of the enquiries have been received by e-mail. Hotline users are mainly private people looking for reliable information about pellets as a relatively unknown fuel in Poland. These were also potential investors interested in entering the market and looking for latest market info. Most often questions concerned the pellets suppliers/consumers database.

In total, 77 contacts were registered, of which 70% were from Poland. BAPE was also contacted from countries all over Europe. Many of the contacts were looking for contacts in Poland (pellet producers and consumers). Another important issue was information on combustion technologies.

2.5. France (ADEME)

ADEME received 45 mails. 22 of them were from pellet producers from outside Europe (Asia, South America, etc.). 10 consultancies were asking for data for internal studies. Other inquiries came from students, press, and equipment manufacturers who were interested in exporting their products.
2.6. Denmark (FORCE)

During the course of the PELLETS@LAS project FORCE Technology has had around 200 hotline inquiries. Most of the inquiries came by mail - only few by phone. Most inquiries are on pellet issues, while some concern other types of biomass, mainly agricultural residues and others again concern biomass plant operation and feasibility studies.

The pellet inquiries mainly concern information on market intelligence (prices, volumes etc.) and contact information for large market actors. Quite many of the inquiries come from new suppliers of pellets who are investigating new market possibilities. Many of these originate from market actors outside EU i.e. Ukraine, Belarus, Egypt, US. Actors in Brazil also seem to be particularly active. In opposition to earlier, some inquiries have now come from pure investor companies who need to assess market information. FORCE has experienced quite few inquiries of the "Please send me all you have on biomass" type which were common 5-10 years ago and typically sent by students in various stages of their education.

In most cases the reply from FORCE to the inquirer contains a short answer to the questions, references to the website and an offer to elaborate on the issue or to digest available information.

2.7. Other

In the course of the project, two additional hotline contacts in Italy (ETA) and Finland (VTT as cooperation partner) were established.

3. Summary

The total number of hotline contacts is estimated to exceed 750. The expected performance within this task (500 contacts) was fully achieved.

In general, the hotline proved to be a valuable dissemination tool and can be recommended to similar projects. Stakeholders obviously appreciated this offer.

The main benefits of the hotline service can be summarized as follows:

- Market stakeholders could get advice on the utilization of the gathered data;
- Positive impacts on market development were achieved, especially by providing consultancy to e.g. potential investors or by linking market actors with each other;
- For the project, additional contacts could be established and feedback could be collected.

However, it has to be noted, that the hotline was rarely contacted by end-consumers. It seems that typical end-consumers prefer other means of information. It is also remarkable that a significant portion of requests came from companies from outside Europe, who are interested in exporting pellets to Europe.
4. Feedback

In the following, some examples of positive feedback, received in English language by email by various partners, are presented:

“… - Thank you very much for replying to my inquiry. This information is very helpful and a great starting point. Thank you again and I appreciate your help. - …” Todd Murrell, IVG Energy, USA.

“… - Thank you so much for such a quick answer. I am doing a market study about the possibility to import pellets, so this information was excellent for me. - …” Noel Kutz, NK Alliance, Russia.

“… - Thank you again for your time earlier today and also, for the information you sent through below. - …” Alex Morgan, Sainsbury’s Procurement, London UK.

“… - Many thanks for the discussion on wood pellets a little earlier. We hope that new funding will be found to continue improving market reports and data on wood pellet markets. - …” Marek Guizot, Pöyry Forest Industry Consulting, Cheam, UK.

“… - We are constant readers of your great website www.pelletsatlas.info. - …” Fedor Kirilov, pellet producer, Belarus.

“… - I have read your excellent report on the “Pellet Market Overview report Europe” and wonder if you wouldn’t mind my ringing you for a brief conversation. - …” Justin Maguire, Bord na Mona Fuels, Kildare, Ireland.

“… - I would like to say that the Pellets@las reports have helped me greatly with understanding the pellet market. - …” Maja Dobrinić, The Big Bridge Company Ltd, Sisak, Croatia.

“… - We have found your website most informative, thank you for all the helpful information and documents. - …” Adam Reid Levine, Canadian Bioenergy Corporation, North Vancouver, Canada.

“… - I find this a very good source of information and it is presented very well. - …” Sally-Ann Young, Drax Power Ltd, Selby, UK.

“… - PELLETS@LAS appears to be a fantastic information source and resource for the community of pellet producers. - …” Brian Caouette, Harvard Kennedy School, Cambridge, USA.

“… - I am currently assisting a company in Romania who wants to start pellets production in the country. In order to make a business case I was recommended pellets@las website which seems to me as very informative. - …” Göran Uvner, Chamber of commerce Sweden Romania, Sweden.

“… - Many thanks for your website, I have found tons of valuable information there. We are setting up a new pellets mill business in Slovakia so all good infos are really helpful. - …” Martin Janecek.

“… - I have just been on the pellets@las website and see there is a great amount of info available on pellets. - …” Daniel Todd, Mitsui & Co., Melbourne, Australia.