

Press Release No. 52/2010

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A nod to biomass, but not at the expense of biodiversity and climate protection

Federal Environment Agency presents long-term strategy for sustainable use of biomass

The UBA Bio-global research project outlines a long-term strategy for a sustainable means of production and energetic use of biomass. "The use of bio-energy only makes sense if it produces considerably lower levels of greenhouse gases than through the use of fossil fuels, and if there is no adverse impact on the environment," says Jochen Flasbarth, President of the Federal Environment Agency. The Federal Environment Agency is encouraging a rethinking of the use of biomass. In the long term, the cultivation, processing, and application of biomass must be practiced sustainably worldwide. UBA is working towards this goal by means of further research projects. A core element of this long-term strategy is the multiple use of biomass before its use to produce energy.

Starting 1 January 2011 suppliers of biofuels and biogenic electricity must provide binding proof of their sustainable production methods. The EU has defined sustainability criteria for biofuels and liquid biofuels in the 2009 Renewable Energies Directive with respect to the protection of climate and biodiversity.

Multiple use of biomass

Biomass is presently used mainly to generate electric power, heat, and fuel. However, biomass is a scarce resource and regenerative materials such as wood or vegetable oils should instead be used for the manufacture of products. In lieu of the currently prevailing cultivation of biomass for direct conversion into bioenergy for power, heat and fuels, a cascaded use will be practiced in the future.

This means that waste and residual materials are to be used for energy production only after multiple use. The primary use of wood, for example, would be as furniture or construction timber, and subsequent use in the sense of 'cascaded use' is for energy production.

Establish global sustainability standards

In the long term, renewable raw materials should mainly be cultivated on land that is of limited usability or entirely unsuited for the production of food and feed. Cultivation of bioenergy plants may neither adversely affect biodiversity nor give rise to indirect land use changes. "For the sake of environmental protection, it is important that cultivation of bioenergy plants on a large scale occur, but without negative consequences for soils and water resources," said Jochen Flasbarth.

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Another strategic approach is to develop binding project-specific sustainability standards for international and bilateral financing institutes. In particular, the standards concern soil, water and social issues. Such project-specific standards are "below" the WTO threshold and may also address local environmental issues and social concerns.

Sustainability standards must be defined for all biomass in the long term. UBA is working towards this goal by means of ongoing research projects.

Initial results and experience gained in bioenergy certification provide an opportunity to develop sustainability standards for all biomass at the global level and establish them for all traded agricultural raw materials. Currently, the Global Bioenergy Partnership (GBEP), a G8 initiative, is the only mechanism that enables global negotiations on sustainability standards for bioenergy. It is therefore necessary to integrate sustainability standards for biomass into other existing global treaties, e.g. the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) of the Kyoto Protocol for the UN Climate Framework Convention, and in the discussion about REDD (reduced emissions from deforestation and forest degradation).

The *Development of strategies and sustainability standards for the certification of biomass for international trade* research report has been published in German in the UBA-Texte series as Nr. 48/2010, and as Nr. 49/2010 in English. The former can be downloaded as a free PDF file at <http://www.uba.de/uba-info-medien-e/3960.html>, the latter at <http://www.uba.de/uba-info-medien-e/3961.html>. It can also be borrowed from the Federal Environment Agency library.

Dessau-Roßlau, 4 November 2010