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**Press Relation Officer:** Martin Ittershagen

**Deputy Press Relation Officer:** Stephan Gabriel Haufe

**PR-staff:** Magnus Maier Marc Rathmann, Martin Stallmann;  
Office: Doreen Redlich, Uwe Weber

**Telephone:** +49 340 2103 -2122, -6625, -2067, -2250, -2507, -2669, -2637

**Address:** Federal Environment Agency, P.O. box 1406, 06813 Dessau-Roßlau

**E-Mail:** [pressestelle@uba.de](mailto:pressestelle@uba.de)

**Internet:** [www.umweltbundesamt.de](http://www.umweltbundesamt.de)

**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/umweltbundesamt.de](http://www.facebook.com/umweltbundesamt.de)



## Managing biomass sustainably - Respect the ecological limits of land use! UBA position: Food has priority over energy production

**The competition over land use is becoming stiffer, and one reason is the rising demand for biomass for food, energy or building materials. At the same time, the use of land worldwide is associated with serious ecological and social problems. Hunger and food insecurity are an unsolved problem, soil degradation is becoming widespread, water resources are becoming scarcer. The Federal Environment Agency therefore believes that the use of biomass crops, including raw timber, for the production of energy should not be expanded any further. "Land use worldwide is still far from being sustainable. Soils are overused, nature is being destroyed and one billion people suffer hunger. These ills must be remedied urgently," explained Jochen Flasbarth upon publication of the position paper *Globale Landflächen und Biomasse nachhaltig und ressourcenschonend nutzen [Using global land areas and biomass sustainably and resource-efficiently].***

Scientific analysis from the Federal Environment Agency concludes that energy supply in Germany should not rely on biomass cultivation in the longer term. This is valid for electricity and heat energy and in the transport sector. Other options must be pursued as concerns transport in particular, for example improving the efficiency of conventional engines or promoting the development of synthetic fuels from electricity produced in wind farms and photovoltaic installations. Says Jochen Flasbarth, "We applaud the Commission's proposal to freeze the quota which has already been introduced for biofuel produced from cultivated biomass. In the medium term, the quota should be set at a level that can be maintained exclusively with the use of non-critical raw materials." The Federal Environment Agency generally advocates a gradual stop to cultivation of the common energy crops such as maize, rape or palm oil. Instead, technologies and schemes should be promoted to first recycle residual materials such as food or wood waste, and only then reuse them for the production of energy.

The decisive factor in the Federal Environment Agency's assessment is the limited land space available worldwide for agricultural production, and what is available must be used to produce food. "Even if agricultural productivity increases and farming methods are ecologically compatible, we will still need the available land area around the world to provide food for more than 9 billion people. Therefore, there is only a limited amount of land area available for growing energy crops."

Should crop fields not be needed to produce food, they might be used for certain purposes to grow energy crops, for instance if there are not yet any alternative solutions in the near future. Whether land area can be used for purposes other than to grow food depends on how much meat is in the human diet. If the consumption of meat increases, so does the demand for land to grow feed. A more vegetarian-based diet in industrialised and developing countries would make a significant contribution to securing food for the global population. To actually achieve this goal requires putting a stop to soil degradation, reducing food waste and regulating land grabbing and speculation in agricultural commodities.

In general and particularly in areas where biomass is produced for energy or fuel, certain ecological and social minimum standards will have to be observed. This will require a functional system of certification which upholds high standards of ecological production.

Dessau-Roßlau, 25 October 2012

### **Further information and links:**

Download

The Federal Environment Agency position paper titled Globale Landflächen und Biomasse nachhaltig und ressourcenschonend nutzen [Using global land areas and biomass sustainably and resource-efficiently] is available here:

<http://www.umweltbundesamt.de/uba-info-medien-e/4321.html>