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Supporting sustainable bioenergy and biogas

Reflections from discussions at EU Sustainable Energy Week Event (EUSEW) – 20 June 2019

A pivotal moment for sustainable bioenergy policy

The governance of bioenergy and the ability to secure biomass' sustainable production lie at the heart of Europe's low carbon future. They are also implicated as Europe strives to stimulate an innovative, environmentally responsible bioeconomy and central to the desire to offer farmers and foresters alternative financial opportunities. We currently sit at a policy cross roads with the new recast Renewable Energy Directive (RED II) being implemented, while the future of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is under negotiation. Both are key tools, relevant to securing environmentally responsible biomass supply chains and promoting investment in best practice bioenergy solutions.

IEEP, together with the European Biogas Association, hosted a session at the EU Sustainable Energy Week 2019 to discuss among a panel of key stakeholders (including the energy industry, farmers, environmental groups and rural development actors) the governance of bioenergy moving forward. The aim of the session was to explore how policy can better be tailored to support bioenergy and biogas best practices that deliver against Europe's climate goals while protecting the environment and enabling positive economic and social outcomes. How can we exploit the policy opportunities in both the energy and agricultural arena, at the EU, the national, regional and local level?



Policy recommendations

The transposition of the RED II into national legislation represents a pivotal moment, when Member States should be ambitious in how they choose to demonstrate that bioenergy feedstocks are sustainability sourced. The following recommendations were identified during the discussions:

- Coordinate across all relevant policy instruments to ensure that they are building on each other, not contradicting.
- Rural Development Programmes need to better coordinate action on the bioeconomy, and promote only best practice approaches to bioenergy and biogas.
- A clear taxonomy for different types of biogas solutions and best practice standards is needed to inform investor and farmer decision making
- Ensure adequate reporting and transparency of planning

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Building bridges

Delivery of sustainable bioenergy and biogas requires moving beyond simply talking about the energy produced. Bioenergy solutions require constant inputs of biomass to generate output. Bioenergy solutions are therefore about the sourcing, availability of biomass and how this is achieved in a way that is environmentally responsible, in order to deliver economic value. As for the wider bioeconomy, this requires knowledge of resource potential at the local, regional, national and international scale. Today many Rural Development Programmes do not adequately integrate decisions on support for bioenergy and the wider bioeconomy with wider understanding of resource availability and the potential of value chains. The agriculture and energy sectors need to work together to build a collective transition and a sustainable future of bioresource use.

Making progress requires breaking the policy silos (i.e. ensuring stronger synergies between agriculture, waste, energy and transport legislation). This implies enhanced coordination between policy makers operating at different governance levels and with actors along the existing supply chain and potential future value chains, including local communities. It also requires clearer definitions across the range of sustainable bioresources and clarity over best practice end uses (e.g. types of biogas). In turn this should be supported by monitoring, improved data collection and public data sharing, advice and capacity building services.

Bringing different experts and different knowledge holders together is a start towards better integration of ideas and understanding. The event deliberately drew experts from across a wide sphere of energy, rural, business and environmentally focused backgrounds. Only in this way can true collaborative solutions be defined.

Additional resources

- [ENRD TG on the Bioeconomy: Seizing the opportunities for rural Europe](#)
- [Understanding the consequences of changing biomass demand for energy \(ReceBio study for DG Environment\)](#)
- [Sustainability critical to the development of advanced biofuels \(Study for the European Climate Foundation\)](#)
- [The cascading use of woody biomass in the EU \(Cascades study for DG Grow\)](#)

Event speakers

- **Pete Harrison**, Executive-Director, EU Policy, European Climate Foundation (moderator)
- **Catherine Bowyer**, Senior Policy Analyst, IEEP (Presentation)
- **Harm Grobrügge**, President, European Biogas Association (EBA) (Presentation)
- **Emilio Folli**, Farmer, Consorzio Italiano Biogas
- **Luke Edwards**, Climate Change and Land Use Policy Officer, BirdLife International
- **Galin Gentchev**, Policy Officer, DG AGRI, European Commission
- **Laura Jalasjoki**, Policy Officer, European Network for Rural Development

Bottom-up action

In Europe, the Renewable Energy Directive (RED and RED II) is a primary driver of the use of bioenergy and biogas. However, conditions vary across Europe, and clearly different solutions and policy support mechanisms may be appropriate in different contexts. IEEP highlighted some specific cases of Member States developing successful bioenergy and biogas policy approaches that respond to sustainability concerns while promoting local engagement and buy-in. EBA presented an approach to increasing biogas production while preserving food security in Italy. Into the future RED II offers the opportunity for Member States to continue to innovate in terms of regulation and governance of bioenergy, to promote sustainable solutions and rural development opportunities.

Sustainability concerns

There are opportunities economically and socially (in particular for connectivity of rural communities and energy independence) offered by adopting bioenergy and biogas solutions. However, the use and allocation of bioresources needs to be strictly linked to sustainability criteria to ensure that the distribution of resources is fair across all sectors and energy is sourced from materials that genuinely contribute to climate mitigation and environmental protection.

Volume based targets need to be considered carefully, taking fully into account the potential resource base and alternative potential uses. Policy solutions driven bottom up, that take into account the local resource base, offer an alternative approach to bioenergy development. To deliver this data on resource availability, financing and knowledge sharing are critical to ensure best practices are adopted.