

NFU backs British biofuel production

FO Licht's World Ethanol & Biofuels Report

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The 'British Model' of biofuel production yields genuine greenhouse gas savings, unlike biofuels produced elsewhere in the world where there are fewer environmental safeguards, the English National Farmers' Union (NFU) claimed this week.

The union took the opportunity of national Biofuels Day – when the Renewable Transport Fuels Obligation (RTFO) was introduced, requiring all fuel companies to replace 2.5% of their fossil fuel sales with biofuels - to highlight the environmental requirements under which British biofuel crop producers operate.

"All biofuels are not the same, and different systems of biofuel production have hugely varying impacts on the environment, greenhouse gas emissions and the food versus fuel equation," said NFU president Peter Kendall. "There is a world of difference between biofuels grown on cleared rain-forest and then transported half way across the globe and those grown sustainably here in Britain."

British-grown and processed biofuels achieve savings of up to 64% in greenhouse gas emissions compared with petrol or diesel, Kendall said. The crops are grown to independently monitored farm assurance standards and they yield as much high protein animal feed as they do bioethanol or biodiesel.

The key elements in the British model of biofuels are that:

The raw materials are produced in accordance with the Assured Combinable Crops Scheme, which covers pesticide use, storage, transport and record keeping;

EU cross-compliance conditions of the single payment scheme require environmentally friendly field margins and preclude damage to landscape or biodiversity;

Every tonne of wheat used for bioethanol or oilseed rape for biodiesel yields a third of a tonne of fuel and a third of a tonne of high protein animal feed.

Kendall added that the impact of biofuels on world food supplies and prices had been "grossly exaggerated". Less than 1% of the world's wheat crop was used for bioethanol production last year, yet wheat prices more than doubled. High prices were the result of growing world demand for food, together with "years of under-investment in agriculture around the world," he claimed.

"In the UK we can produce all of the biodiesel and bioethanol needed to meet the targets of the Renewable Transport Fuel Obligation from feed wheat that would otherwise be exported, or oilseed rape grown on former set-aside land. Even the EU target of a 10% inclusion rate by 2020 will have only a minor impact on prices," Kendall predicted.

Meanwhile, the UK's Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) has published a report warning that the government is taking too little account of the

possible impacts of biofuel production on the environment, and calling instead for an emphasis on second-generation biofuels.

The RSPB said the government had just commissioned a review of the impacts of biofuels, which should expose some of the hazards of biofuel production. But "bizarrely," the RTFO had come into force before its findings were known. Legal standards on environmental impacts were not due to come into force until 2010 or 2011.

The report*, *A Cool Approach To Biofuels*, calls for all biofuels to be legally required to cut greenhouse gas emissions by at least 60%. And it claims that Europe can only meet its biofuel targets through imports, causing devastating habitat loss and price rises for staple foods in the developing world.

It therefore urges ministers to direct investment away from current biofuels to fund the development of second generation biofuels, such as those using crop wastes.

Technology enabling wood, grass and algae to be turned into fuel is being developed and early signs are that emissions will be low, the report says. Transport emissions could also be cut, through improvements in vehicle efficiency and enforcing speed limits.

The RSPB is one of the largest non-governmental organisations in the UK, with more than one mln members.