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Biofuels from sustainable production only – state secretary Klöckner presents first European certification system for biomass

Within the European Union, liquid / transport biofuels may only be financially supported or be counted towards renewable energy targets if the biomass used is produced in a sustainable way.

“Germany is now the first EU member state to have developed a certification scheme for sustainable biomass production. The preliminary approval of this certification system, the “ International Sustainability and Carbon Certification (ISCC)“, by the German Federal Agency for Agriculture and Food (BLE) means we are transposing European requirements into national law”, says **Julia Klöckner, Parliamentary State Secretary of the Federal Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Consumer Protection.**

EU requirements aim to ensure that biomass (e.g. palm oil) is not produced at the expense of valuable natural habitats in the respective producer countries. Examples of such habitats are primary forest, biodiversity hotspots or wetlands. Moreover, the EU directive demands that the production of a biofuel reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 35%, compared to fossil fuels.

Two acts put the EU directives into German law: one act defines the demands on a sustainable production of liquid biofuels for electricity (BioSt-NachV), the other the demands on a sustainable production of transport biofuels (Biokraft-NachV).

Proof of sustainability is a prerequisite for receiving the set feed-in tariffs for electricity from liquid biomass and for counting transport biofuels sold in Germany towards the national quota or (in case of pure biofuels) qualifying for tax deductions. The acts also regulate the procedures for proof of sustainability and for certification. “With the preliminary approval of ISCC we are the first country to be able to meet demands for a sustainable biomass production”, Klöckner says.

Background information

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ISCC was developed during 2006, funded by BMELV through its project management body, Fachagentur Nachwachsende Rohstoffe (Agency for Renewable Resources, FNR). After a two-year test phase, implementation has now started. The international certification of biomass is uncharted terrain for all participants, be it governments, NGOs, scientists or industry. Over the next years, the pioneering project ISCC will have to prove that it can meet the high expectations and guarantee sustainability.

ISCC works as follows: certificates are issued at each interface between steps in the biomass supply chain, such as tradespersons or cooperatives, oil mills and refineries which process liquid or gaseous biomass to end use quality. The certificates are supervised through approved certification systems. At the last interface, i.e. the last processing step, a proof of sustainability is issued for the transport or liquid biofuel. This document is then used by the power plant operator to claim the feed-in tariff. Certificates are issued by a certification body which must be governmentally approved (as must the certificate itself).

ISCC is the first system which has received preliminary approval by BLE. It was developed by meó Corporate Development GmbH in collaboration with a number of participants from agriculture, trade, industry, science and NGOs. meó will also manage the changeover to regular operation of the ISCC. An extensive coaching session for auditors is being organised at the end of January. After the certification bodies have also been approved by BLE, the first regular certification can begin.

Audit experience has already been gathered through pilot projects in the EU, Argentine, Brazil and Malaysia. These tested procedures now have to be transformed into a workable system on a global scale. As an example, this means to transfer electronic registers of certificates, certification bodies and members of the ISCC certification system into a database which can be accessed worldwide.