

Need for balanced UN text on biofuels



Biofuels policy is currently under examination by the UN's High Level Panel of Experts (HLPE) on food security. Set in the context of the FAO's 2012 call for the suspension of biofuels targets, the primary aim of the 85-page draft text (http://typo3.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/hlpe/hlpe_documents/_Biofuels/HLPE_V0_draft_report_Biofuels_and_Food_Security-09-Jan-2013.pdf) is to analyze the implications for food security of global and national biofuels markets.

Importantly for the private sector, the text raises debates on sustainability, responsible investment, food prices and certification schemes for access to the biofuels market. The final draft will be written in June and will be part of a decision process that will be debated and agreed by the UN Committee on Food Security in October in Rome.

The private sector therefore must gear up to participate in negotiations in the run-up to October to ensure there is a balanced perspective on biofuels in the UN outcomes. The Private Sector Mechanism at the UN Committee on Food Security has already reviewed the preliminary draft and suggested it is particularly important for the next draft of the text to include:

- Balanced consideration of the relationship between food security and first generation biofuels. Food and fuel are not mutually exclusive outcomes. The demand incentive for biofuels from food crops in recent years has led directly to greater crop production and productivity improvements and investment in the agricultural supply chain.
- Recognition for the positive role that moderate targets and mandates have played, particularly to minimize the downward slope of agricultural investments and commodity prices. Investments in agriculture generate more economic growth in developing countries than investments in any other sector, which in turn would benefit the poor and undernourished.
- Better information on biofuels and sustainability. First generation biofuel production has provided incentives for making agriculture more sustainable and productive all over the world, thereby considerably increasing the global productivity potential of agriculture. For example, standards in some regions have been put in place to prevent any negative ecological and social effects potentially associated with the production of biofuels. This means the cultivation of crops for biofuel production and the production processes themselves are meeting high standards that often go beyond those applied to food or livestock feed production in some places.

- A fairer discussion on biofuel production and land use: just 2-3% of global farmland is dedicated to the cultivation of biofuel crops.
- Greater caution when using Indirect Land Use Change (ILUC) models in the report. For example, the co-products from food crop based biofuels production are key to supporting food security but this is not fully reflected either in the overall debate, or in many of the studies on Indirect Land Use Change.
- Common sense on certification schemes for "access to the biofuels market": all agricultural production should be socially and environmentally sustainable but that does not mean everything should be under certification schemes which can add unnecessary costs into supply chains. Certification works for supply chains outside of mainstream supply; once you go mainstream it is not the most efficient way of doing things.
- Last but not least, let's not forget that the only current large scale alternative to first generation biofuels in liquid transport fuels is fossil fuels. Abolishing biofuel mandates would lead simply to more use of fossil fuels in the medium term (i.e. up to 2020 and beyond).

For companies and associations that share these concerns, you are encouraged to raise these points with your country's agriculture and foreign affairs departments. It is national governments who vote at the UN, and the case must be made to each nation.

The private sector also has a seat at the table for the UN Committee on Food Security negotiations. Volunteers from Gafta's membership are urged to take the opportunity to join the private sector committee on biofuels by contacting the International Agri-Food Network (IAFN) at robynne@emergingag.com. IAFN is the focal point for the private sector engagement at the UN Committee on Food Security where biofuels are being discussed in 2013. Participants are also needed for the important Plenary of the UN Committee on Food Security in October and are welcome to register at www.agrifood.net.

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