

Roundtable on Sustainable Biofuels

Ensuring that biofuels deliver on their promise of sustainability
An initiative of the EPFL Energy Center



NEWS RELEASE

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Biofuels soon to be measured by international standards

300 experts and representatives of the public and private sector have come together in the Roundtable on Sustainable Biofuels, housed at the EPFL Energy Center, to develop global norms for the economic, social, and environmental impacts of biofuels.

LAUSANNE, August 13, 2008 – Are biofuels a panacea or a threat to climate, food and energy security? While the answer is indeed "it depends", pundits so far have not agreed on global criteria to evaluate the positive or negative impacts of a certain crop, produced in a certain area, processed in a certain way into a biofuel to be used in a certain place.

However, such diverse constituencies as businesses, academics and environmentalists seem closer to a previously unlikely agreement about the economic, social, and environmental sustainability of biofuels. A critical step was announced today, when the Steering Board of the Roundtable on Sustainable Biofuels (RSB), an international initiative hosted by the Energy Center at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne (EPFL), endorsed the first draft of a global sustainability standard for biofuels.

The standard is intended to be used by investors, governments, corporations, and civil society groups to assess the sustainability of different biofuels. “With all of the mixed messages we hear about biofuels, there is a clear need for a standard that can differentiate the good from the bad,” said Claude Martin, chair of the Roundtable and former Director-General of WWF International. “For an issue of such seminal importance, it was necessary to bring many different stakeholder groups together to agree on how to define and measure sustainable biofuels. The publication of the first draft standard today represents an important consensus for how we can judge the development of this industry”.

The draft criteria of the Roundtable for Sustainable Biofuels, developed through a multi-stakeholder process, are based on a comprehensive "land to tank" analysis, covering the whole chain of biofuels' production. ‘Version Zero’ of the standard will now undergo six months of global stakeholder consultation for incorporation into what will become Version One to be released in April, 2009. In-

person feedback sessions on Version Zero are being planned in East Asia, Europe, Mozambique, Mali, and throughout the Americas. “Any interested stakeholder is welcome to attend these meetings or give feedback online,” explained Charlotte Opal, Head of the RSB Secretariat. “Our hope is that by February, 2009, all interested stakeholders will have had their chance to influence the criteria”.

Over three hundred experts from corporations, civil society groups, academic institutions, and government agencies from nearly forty countries helped draft Version Zero of the standard, through teleconferences, an innovative Wiki format (www.bioenergywiki.net), and in-person meetings in Switzerland, Brazil, China, India, and South Africa. The standard addresses the major issues of concern regarding biofuels’ production, including their potential contribution to climate change mitigation and rural development; the protection of land and labor rights; and their impacts on biodiversity, soil pollution, water availability and food security. Version Zero can be accessed here: <http://cgse.epfl.ch/page70341.html> .

The Energy Center at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne, EPFL (one of the two federal institutes of technology in Switzerland) houses the Roundtable on Sustainable Biofuels. Steering Board members include, among others, individuals from BP, Bunge, EPFL, the National Wildlife Federation, the United Nations Environment Programme, Petrobras, Shell, Swiss and Dutch federal agencies, TERI - India, Toyota, UNICA (the Brazilian sugar producers’ union), the World Economic Forum (WEF), and the World Wild Fund for Nature (WWF).

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