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Plant fuels

Food or fuels ?

Food or fuels?

Trust the Greens : food for people - not for cars

Agro-fuel euphoria - a threat for global food security

A shift of investments and land from food to fuel production puts global food security at a serious risk. Agro-fuels produced from grain, oilseeds and sugarcane - misleadingly called biofuels - result in an unsustainable use of land, water and energy: Tropical rain forests are cleared for palm oil plantations; soy production consumes a growing amount of groundwater; the energy balance of the agro-fuels life cycle is often negative. Apart from increased use of pesticides and fertilizers, current global investments in non-food crops lead to the mainstreaming of monocultures and long distance transport instead of sustainable decentralised local solutions. Worldwide, millions of rural people are faced with the threat of being driven off their land without alternative incomes or livelihood.

Agro-fuels - a questionable cure against climate change

Agro-fuels are advertised as solution for the problems related to climate change. However, CO2 is not the only problem. Green plants reduce CO2 but intensive farming practices used to grow maize, cereals, sugar cane, palm oil and soy for fuel are fully based on mineral oil. Models suggesting positive energy balances often neglect important factors like the risk of crop losses from climate change due to increasing droughts, floods, erosion and biodiversity, as well as new diseases caused by changing climate conditions. The growing use of nitrogen contributes to massive emissions of nitrous oxide which is a much more powerful greenhouse gas than CO2.

When the whole lifecycle of agro fuels is considered - from clearing forests to driving cars - emission savings are neutralised by the effects of deforestation, transport and the use of oil-based fertilizers.

Sustainable food production reduces pressure on other people's land

There is no land surplus in a sustainable European food system. The EU is the world's biggest net-importer of food and feed. It uses many millions of hectares abroad and enormous amounts of ground water and mineral oil in order to provide the currently-consumed feed for meat production and food for its citizens. In order to reduce this social and ecological footprint in developing countries and to contribute to reducing the effects of climate change, the EU must improve energy efficiency in its own food system shifting from extremely input-dependant agriculture, processing and transport to a self-energising system that recycles organic waste material, re-integrates crop and livestock production and combines modern renewable energy systems (solar, geothermic, biogas, wind, heating and electric power) on a local level.

Feeding cars might lead to many more people going hungry worldwide

Current massive investments and public policies promoting agro-fuel production create growing competition for land and resources at the expense of the poorest people and regions. Prices for cereals have doubled in one year. World grain stocks are at their lowest level in four decades. Harvest losses due to climate change, increased consumption of meat (e.g. in India and China) accentuate this trend. If the EU, the US and Brazil press ahead with current targets to replace mineral oil with agro-fuels, instead of drastically reducing fuel consumption, a growing number of car owners may well be able to buy food and petrol, while the majority of the poor do not even have enough to eat. China has now stopped new agro-fuels projects in order to avoid food shortages.

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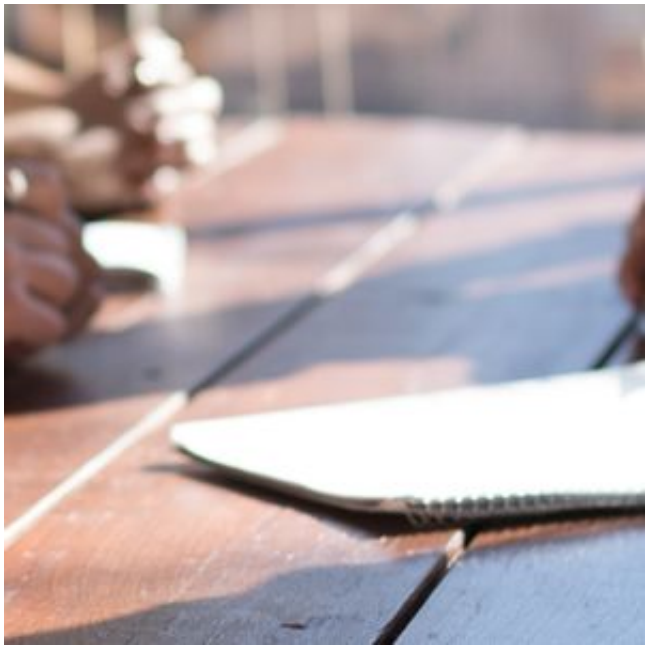
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