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Food or Fuels?

The EU must stop fuelling climate change and hunger



Several years ago, agrofuels were presented as an adequate solution to limit the negative climate impacts of the transport sector. There are currently two European laws that encourage the use of these fuels in the transport sector in order to try and limit its CO2 emissions: **the Renewable Energy directive** (RED) - which established a mandatory target of 10% share of renewable energy in the transport sector - and **the Fuel Quality Directive** (FQD), which was amended in 2009 to include a mandatory target of a 6% reduction in the greenhouse gas (GHG) intensity of fuels used in road transport by 2020. Because of these two pieces of legislation, the use of agrofuels in Europe has been growing since then. However, many scientific reports have shown that the climate impacts from indirect land use change (ILUC) can vary substantially between feedstocks and can negate all of the greenhouse gas savings of agrofuels relative to the fossil fuels they replace. Several experts are now calling for a more accurate measure of their sustainability. The legislation that is to be voted upon on ILUC by the European Parliament on 11th September aims at limiting the negative impacts of agrofuels, given that the sustainability criteria and minimum GHG saving thresholds currently enforced under the two existing directives do not take into account the carbon stock impacts resulting from indirect changes in land use. Last October the European Commission proposed to introduce a 5% cap on those conventional food crop biofuels that can be counted towards the renewable energy source (RES) targets. It also introduces ILUC estimate values (but to be used in reporting only), with a review clause to consider accounting them under sustainability criteria after 2020. While the vote in the Environment Committee of the European Parliament on 11th July marked a small step towards increased sustainability of agrofuels, it resulted in a limit of 5.5% only on the amount of food-based crops that are allowed to make up this quota. If the EU is to adequately tackle the challenges posed by agrofuels, ILUC factors must be binding and take into account the emissions from indirect land

use change caused by different groups of crops as part of the GHG life-cycle calculations required by the RED sustainability criteria. This way, the agrofuels causing the highest indirect emissions would not be eligible for contributing to the target. The 5% cap on conventional food crop biofuels must be maintained in order to limit the incentive for producing conventional biofuels from food crops and therefore limit the risk to food supply. A parallel measure should also be introduced in the FQD. Increased use of biofuels from food crops contributes to food price volatility, with significant negative impacts on global food security. It endangers the right to food and access to land by local communities, especially in developing countries**.** To avoid the food versus fuels battle, EU legislation must make clear that in future, there will be no support granted to agrofuels from food and feed crops. Their phase-out must be clearly stated in the new legislation in order to encourage the shift to more advanced feedstocks. If it doesn't properly address ILUC, the EU's target for renewable energy in the transport sector will fail to deliver genuine carbon savings and will instead encourage widespread deforestation, food insecurity and higher food prices in Europe and beyond. If it's serious about cutting carbon emissions in the transport sector, the EU needs to shift towards putting the right climate safeguards in place as well as better public transport services, more energy-efficient vehicles and encouraging the supply of green renewable electricity. These are the only truly long-term solutions with effective economic, social and environmental benefits.

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