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Claus Sauter, Bioenergy Expert, Founder & CEO of VERBIO AG addresses current issues of (bio)energy, energy security and (green) mobility

Column

Co-HVO: It's driving me nuts!

Once you've lost your reputation, it can grow out of control: Just four months after the WWF published a study warning of the dangers of palm oil production "Auf der Ölspur" (1), the Federal Ministry for the Environment is preparing new pro-palm oil legislation. Yes – you did read that correctly: pro-palm oil!

For years now environmental activists, citizens and also politicians have been rightly protesting against the unpopular palm oil. Slash-and-burn farming methods, contraventions of human rights and the threats to entire species in tropical rainforests are not an acceptable price to pay for sourcing a vegetable oil. Cheap production of palm oil is not bothered by these issues and annual increases of around 7 percent have been recorded. More than 17 million hectares are currently used for palm oil cultivation, taking away the natural habitation of orangutans and other animals. Germany contributes to making species extinct globally by consuming 1.8 million tonnes of palm oil annually – clearly the federal government intends to increase this even further, because the current draft of the 37th Regulation on the Implementation of the Federal Emissions Protection Act (BlmSchV) promotes the use of biogenic fuel additives, known as Co-HVO, by crediting its use for greenhouse gas reduction quotas (GHG quota). The biogenic oils are processed in oil refineries together with mineral oils in a co-refining process. This can only mean that palm oil will be used in the foreseeable future, for technical and commercial reasons. Palm oil as a substitute for rapeseed oil! Using environmentally damaging palm oil as a diesel additive, contributing to environmental damage, and as a consequence reducing the use of biodiesel from home-grown rapeseed oil is just ridiculous in my view.

The use of biofuels is intended to achieve a 6 percent reduction of greenhouse gas emissions generated in the transport sector by 2020. This can also be achieved in an environmentally friendly way. German biodiesel can be generated using German rapeseed oil. This would improve the CO₂ balance and would also support domestic agriculture.

The image of biodiesel has been suffering from the disastrous effects of the increase in palm oil production in Asia. At the same time, more than 90 percent of the fuel used by the German biodiesel industry has been based on rapeseed oil. We don't need palm oil.

If the federal government was being consistent, it would ban the use of biodiesel for production purposes completely. But it is doing exactly the opposite. The Federal Ministry for the Environment's current draft legislation is damaging the environment and is bad for orangutans and bad for German agriculture.

What we need is our own quota for advanced second-generation biofuels made from residual materials such as straw, used fats or sludge. We have the technology and the production plants in Germany to do this. Between 8 and 13 million tonnes of straw lie unused on German cornfields every year (2) – that would be enough to power a good five million CO₂ neutral passenger vehicles, in the same way as an electric car is powered from electricity generated from 100 percent renewable sources.

We do not need Co-HVO in order to achieve the planned CO₂ savings. All we need is a clear commitment from the federal government to advanced second-generation biofuels. Instead of promoting slash-and-burn farming methods in the tropics, the federal government should promote domestic agriculture and Germany's innovative Mittelstand. Instead of using Co-HVO from palm oil it should be promoting highly efficient biofuels manufactured from waste products.

Accordingly I will campaign for the immediate withdrawal from Co-HVO and against the destruction of the earth's natural resources.

Claus Sauter

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VERBIO Vereinigte BioEnergie AG**

(1) WWF Deutschland, Juli 2016

(2) DBFZ, 2011

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