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european renewable ethanol

PRESS RELEASE

Renewable ethanol is essential to EU energy security, and 'there is a huge potential to do more'

As war in the Middle East makes fossil fuel dependence even more unsustainable, it's clear that Europe needs to boost its domestic biofuel production

BRUSSELS, 5 March 2026 – The outbreak of war in the Middle East is yet another reminder of how important and urgent it is for Europe to secure its energy supply and end its dependence on imported fossil oil. Renewable fuels such as bioethanol offer a ready-made, homegrown solution, but EU policies need to be better at unleashing their potential.

European ethanol biorefineries producing food, feed, fuel and biogenic CO_2 are strategic domestic assets that can help the EU to realise its ambitions for climate change mitigation as well as energy independence, food security, and agricultural and industrial autonomy, all while strengthening EU farmers' revenue.

As dramatic geopolitical repositioning requires Europe to think more about its resilience, competitiveness and independence, there has never been a more important time for the EU to adopt policies that make the best use of these renewable resources.

This was confirmed by European Commissioner Christophe Hansen at a Global Food Forum debate in Brussels on 3 March. "There is a huge potential to do more" when it comes to making better use of renewable energy source such as biofuels, Commissioner Hansen said, according to Politico. "We have refineries all over Europe and all of them are under their maximum capacity."

However, current EU policies that unfairly discriminate against crop-based biofuels such as renewable ethanol are inconsistent and counterproductive to achieving these goals. In fact, the European Commission's own statistics every year confirm that uptake of renewables in transport is being hindered by unfounded discrimination against crop-based biofuels, leaving the EU needlessly over-reliant on fossil fuels.

Moreover, these policies—along with trade agreements such as EU-Mercosur – threaten an important market for European farmers, who are among the most productive in the world but cannot compete against countries where diversification of biomass uses is at play along with less stringent regulation and lower overall production costs.

There is a better way: a win-win solution that valorises the sustainable use of domestic biomass – multipurpose crops, waste and residues from European farms – into a variety of outputs that help build European autonomy and competitiveness while reducing the EU's fossil-fuel use.

The important climate benefits of renewable ethanol do not come at the expense of food security: European ethanol biorefineries produce more food and feed than fuel, as well as important quantities of domestically captured biogenic CO_2, which replaces fossil CO_2 in a variety of applications.

Furthermore, a large share of ethanol production takes place in synergy with sugar and starch production – outputs that would be enhanced if ethanol uses were increased.

Like in major agricultural countries (US, Brazil, India), it is critical that the EU understands the important synergies between food and non-food uses of biomass, as a recent study from the Nova Institute confirmed. It is therefore refreshing to hear Commissioner Hansen say, according to news reports, that the "tank vs plate dilemma belongs to the past."

According to the Nova Institute study, the use of agricultural biomass for food, renewable fuels and green chemicals guarantees important benefits for food security, biodiversity, agriculture and climate change mitigation.

Now it's more important than ever for EU policymakers to move beyond outdated 'food vs fuel' nonsense and make better use of its bioeconomy, biofuels and agricultural sector.

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