

Adopted resolution

On Plant fuels

The European Green Party supports only those plant fuels that are produced and distributed in a way that is energy-efficient, helps reduce greenhouse emissions and does not threaten food and water security, human rights, biodiversity and/or ecosystems.

The awareness that oil reserves will become increasingly costly to extract over the next few years has led politicians and industrialists to consider producing plant fuels on a large scale. Biomass is the simplest way of capturing and storing solar energy and carbon via photosynthesis, and because most plant fuels are produced from plants, it is sometimes assumed that partly or wholly replacing fossil fuels with plant fuels will automatically help cut greenhouse gas emissions. In fact, not only is this unlikely, on the basis of current science, but in many circumstances plant fuels production comes into direct conflict with conservation and human development goals (see Annexe).

Considering:

- that human activities are now generally acknowledged to be a major factor in recent global warming and consequent climate change;
- that the economies of our respective countries are highly dependent on dwindling global fossil fuel stocks;
- that those countries have signed the Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change;
- that oil resources are limited and future oil production will be even more damaging for climate and nature than today's - especially when we think about tar sands and coal liquification;
- that plant fuels produced in a sustainable way are important to reduce greenhouse gas in traffic;
- that fair trade with plant fuels can help to support underdeveloped regions;
- that some plants like the oil-plant jatropha can help to fight desertification and improve food production;
- that the energy efficiency rating of plant fuels varies widely according to production processes, transportation distances, uses made of by-products, etc.;
- that current science suggests that the greenhouse gas benefits of switching to some plant fuels are marginal;
- that devolving farm output (in particular of cereals) to large-scale fuel production might threaten to put pressure on world food supplies;
- that forests and peat lands in southern countries risk being destroyed to make way for monoculture plant fuels crops, with corresponding losses of biodiversity and natural habitats, and massive increases in carbon emissions;
- that where this process has already taken place, it has frequently been accompanied by human rights abuses;
- that in some cases plans to develop plant fuels are closely linked with manufacturers' interest in finding new applications for genetically modified organisms, whose environmental and social impact has been widely condemned in many Green statements;
- that farm production of fuel crops should be subjected to the same environmental and social

criteria as we demand for farming in general;

- that agriculture has always produced three types of goods: food, materials such as wood and straw for fuel and construction purposes, and textiles (wool, cotton etc.), only the third category of products traditionally being exported over long distances,
- although some plant fuels technologies cannot meet all environmental criteria as yet, they can still represent a great option for the future, if given the chance to mature. We should let many flowers bloom.

The European Green Party is in favour of small-scale agricultural energy production as set out in the EU Directive of May 2003. Specifically, we believe that pure vegetable oils should be authorised as a fuel and their on-farm use encouraged, where production, distribution and use of by-products take place in the same area (appropriate distances will vary from one country to another). Individual farmers or co-operative structures should be allowed to sell surpluses for local use. On-farm gasification (methane production) should also be encouraged. In general, energy-efficient, local use of rural and urban organic waste matter, including for energy production, is to be encouraged.

To this end, energy-related taxes and investment grants should favour low-input, energy-efficient, environment-friendly production processes. Petroleum-based fuels should not benefit from any tax exemptions. Conversely, pure vegetable oils should be entirely tax exempt under certain conditions. Likewise, production of methane by breaking down organic matter should be encouraged by investment grants, assistance with running costs and/or the purchase of electricity produced by this means.

If these incentives are to provide the intended leverage for a Greener type of agriculture, they must be conditional on environment-friendly farming techniques (such as crop rotations, mixed cropping, low energy-input cultivation, stringent restrictions on use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides and observance of the precautionary principle with regard to genetically modified organisms). We will strive to ensure that this happens in our respective countries and localities. But we have to think global too: the scramble to find solutions to the twin problems of global climate change and dwindling fossil fuel stocks means that certification systems for plant fuels production and distribution based on the principles of agro biology and sustainability need to be introduced within and between world regions as a matter of urgency. We will work to promote the development and implementation of such systems and to raise awareness of the complex issues involved in production and consumption of plant fuels.