

Biomethane expansion provides local alternatives for imported gas and synthetic fertiliser

Vienna, October 24, 2022: Dr. Paul Bennett, Chairman of IEA Bioenergy to the IEA Bioenergy conference "Technology advances in liquid biofuels and renewable gas".

"Biomethane expansion is a strong tool to replace gas imports. With natural gas prices above 100 EUR/MWh, the competitiveness of biomethane has improved tremendously. Biomethane provides local solutions for waste, avoids emissions of methane and ammonia, and – very importantly – it provides alternatives for synthetic fertilisers, which are heavily reliant on fossil gas," said Dr. Paul Bennett, chairman of IEA Bioenergy in Vienna.

At the IEA Bioenergy conference "Technology advances in liquid biofuels and renewable gas" on October 17, 2022 in Vienna, about 500 experts from around the world joined a discussion on the expansion of climate-friendly biogas and advanced biofuels online or as participants in Vienna.

In March 2022, the European Commission had set the ambitious target to double Biomethane production to 35 billion m³ biomethane by 2030 in its "REPowerEU" energy policy program. The major advantage of biomethane production is that it can be produced from local resources and immediately fed into the existing infrastructure. This reduces dependence on energy imports, especially from Russia.

Biomethane is also a climate-friendly energy, as it replaces fossil fuels and avoids methane emissions – a strong greenhouse gas – that would otherwise be emitted in manure storage or in the decomposing of organic waste. Moreover, the biogenic CO₂ produced during biogas upgrading can easily be separated and either captured or reused, for example in the food industry.

In addition, anaerobic digestion has a by-product digestate, which can be used to produce biofertiliser. This can substitute for synthetic fertilisers that would otherwise require large amounts of natural gas to produce. In fact, around 70 percent of European fertiliser manufacturers have currently cut back or stopped production due to high gas prices. Fertilisers are therefore scarce and expensive, and shortages can lead to major crop losses.

From 2024, EU member states will be required to collect their organic waste separately, which would further boost biogas and biomethane production and contribute to the energy transition. So biomethane production is expected to expand primarily from biogenic wastes and residues such as municipal solid waste, industrial residues, manure, straw, and residues from landscape management.

Also crops that do not require additional land use should be considered, such as intermediate crops or catch crops. Such intercrops are also good agricultural practice as they improve soil conditions and reduce erosion. Dr. Paul Bennett does not foresee land competition for the expansion of biomethane, in the contrary:

"We need reliable, affordable and climate-friendly energy in Europe. It makes no sense to play energy and food off against each other. They are mutually dependent as is clear from the fertiliser issue. What we urgently need, however, is easier access for biomethane producers to the natural gas grid and rapid implementation of the harmonized framework for guarantees of origin. This will create clarity and certainty for farmers, waste processors and new investors."

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