



Sectorial certifications: a part of solution ?

From declarations to actions...

Europe was first interested in agro fuels for several reasons: the opportunities to diversify EC's agriculture, to achieve the GHG emission reductions' goals and to move gradually from dependence on oil. At the European scale, different interests and lobbies have participated in a significant controversy over the pros and cons. Indeed, Members of the European Parliament have been involved in a debate that is currently probably the most relevant to the world today, to increase the demand for social and environmental standards as regards to agro fuels. Europe is currently establishing criteria for locally produced and imported agro fuels. Even if surely economic interests underline these environmental criteria, and are probably the first concerns of many of those who decided to set them up, the fact is that they result in significant changes. One of the main economic targets for Europe is the South-East Asia countries. This region is an important producer of biodiesel's world production from palm oil. It is a major European supplier although, until now, production entailed destruction of thousands of hectares of tropical forests. For those countries therefore, these new criteria are requirements for a rapid and effective change to a more "sustainable" mode of production.

The other target is Brazil. The country has the world's best experience on the industrial processing of sugar cane for ethanol. Brazil uses it as a strong argument for its international policy, to promote a new world order. This agro fuel giant seems however to have heard European criticisms of the past 2 years, as regards to social and environmental aspects.

Reaction in Brazil policies

EMBRAPA (Empresa Brasileira de Pesquisa Agropecuaria) and Environment Federal Ministry have just released the results of a study on land use at national level.

According to the study, 70% of the Brazilian territory should be reserved for indigenous lands, conservation units (UC: Unidade de Conservação), Permanent Protection Areas (APP: Área de Proteção Permanente) and natural protected areas. So that, only 2.8 million square kilometers should be affected to agricultural and mining sectors, infrastructures and urban areas. The study highlights differences with reality. Agricultural and livestock activities only use more than 2.8 million hectares. In addition, many products are grown without complying with the laws ministering land uses (UC, APP ...).

Despite the legitimate concerns raised by these numbers, this study is a good "starting point" to work towards improvements. One of its key values is that it is based on concrete evidence.



Response of the private sector

In addition to political regulations, which are not always implemented, private certifications are getting more and more important. The OIA (<http://www.oiabrazil.com.br/oia.htm>) has established a certification's protocol for sugarcane's products, including ethanol. This tool designed to serve small and medium producers from cooperatives certifies the compliance with good agricultural practice (GAP) in the production concerned. This amounts to a products' quality differentiation, which adds market value. The certification should ensure larger benefits along the supply chain. In addition, criteria would ensure compliance with environmental standards. A system of quality management included in the certification protocol enables it to match the evolving requirements of the most advanced markets.

A producers organization (ASSOBARI) from São Paulo's State has invested in this innovative approach. The OIA presents it as an anticipation of international criteria which will be established in the near future.

The initiative is interesting and deserves to be followed upon...if only to check that it does not remain mere wishful thinking!

[Romain Peyrache](#)

