Biobased Economy offers opportunities for Copenhagen

New book on biobased economy shows: options to increase GHG reductions

As the Copenhagen summit enters its final week, attention is more and more focussed on the negotiations for a new climate treaty. Will negotiators manage to formulate new CO2 objectives? Much will depend on the compensation that is to be offered to developing countries to compensate for their efforts and effects of climate change. In this crucial phase, science may offer new perspectives for GHG reductions. Today, a new publication by Earthscan was presented to the Dutch environmental Minister Cramer.

The book, presenting options for the so-called ´Biobased Economy´, demonstrates that higher GHG reductions can be realized than usually is assumed. A combination of biorefinery (separating biomass into different fractions) and biocascading (defining a production and refining process which primarily focuses on the utilization of valuable fractions) can save up to three times as much fossil fuels (and thus CO2) without increasing land use.

Scientists, lead by researchers related to Wageningen University and Research Centre in the Netherlands, analysed opportunities for the Biobased Economy: large scale, innovative, replacement of fossil fuels (especially oil, gas) by biomass. Looking for realistic opportunities, authors from Germany, Canada, France, Denmark, Sweden and the Netherlands studied biorefinieries, biomaterials, biomass-based chemicals, as well as biofuels and biogas. In addition to technological chapters, they provide case studies from Brazil, Germany, Canada and the Netherlands.

Introduction of the Biobased Economy requires, however, more than technological research. A transition is needed: a long term process in which policy makers, producers, markets, consumers and NGO´s define their visions on possible and desirable implementation of biobased technologies. A separate section of the book is devoted to the role of each of the actor groups. This combination of technical and social sciences is unique in the Biobased Economy.

‘We could save much more CO2 than we currently think’, says Johan Sanders, professor Valorization of of Plant Production Chains at Wageningen University and Research Centre. ‘Much more is possible, and it only requires a different approach. Using biomass to produce chemicals offers huge opportunities. Biorefinery offers possibilities to cash in on these opportunities. This is good news for the environment, but also economically profitable’.

Hans Langeveld (director, Biomass Research)
Johan Sanders (professor Wageningen Universiteit en Research Centre - Valorization of plant production chains)
Marieke Meeusen (Landbouw Economisch Instituut, part of Wageningen UR)

Langeveld and Sanders are travelling to Copenhagen today, to present their book to Dutch environmental minister Cramer. Also invited are representatives of delegations of Brasil, Germany and Canada, countries covered in the book.

For information call Johan Sanders (tel 0317 480140) or Hans Langeveld (06 – 520 58 537).