

Developing a consensus on biomass development

Christopher Rees, Chair of the Board, Canadian Bioenergy Association (Canbio)

Energy conservation coupled with solar, wind, geothermal and bioenergy can all make important contributions to meeting our energy needs and lessening dependence on fossil fuels.

The transition from a fossil-fuel based economy to a renewable energy-based economy will neither be easy nor rapid. But everything possible needs to be done to facilitate and speed-up the process. That requires agreement and cooperation. Unproductive confrontation between groups with differing viewpoints must be replaced by a wide consensus on how to move forward – including the public, industry, First Nations, environmental interests, academia and government.

The Canadian Bioenergy Association strongly believes that the responsible use of forest biomass for the production of energy and chemicals can move ahead without making unacceptable environmental trade-offs and can provide enormous societal benefits.

A recent study in the United States, entitled *Managing Forests Because Carbon Matters: Integrating Energy, Product and Land Management Policy* confirms that “energy produced from forest biomass merely returns recently absorbed carbon to the atmosphere, and essentially results in no net release of carbon, provided that overall forest inventories are stable or increasing.”

Bioenergy development can move ahead simultaneously with an increase in the quantity and quality of forests. Bioenergy development in Europe has been widely supported by the public because forests have continued to grow and traditional forest values have been preserved. After 100 years of being a carbon sink, in recent decades Canada’s forests have been oscillating back and forth between being a carbon sink and a source. This is partly the result of increased wildfires and massive insect kills and downturns in the forest industry. We need policies and practices so that our forests remain net absorbers of carbon in the future and that our forests continue to grow in both quantity and quality and continue to provide a wide range of values.

Several key points need to be emphasized with respect to forest biomass and the bioenergy industry in Canada:

- The forest industry is committed to sustainable and responsible forest management within areas designated for allowable harvest by each Province.
- Biomass harvesting for bioenergy uses only a fraction of total biomass availability in Canada – no large scale extraction is occurring.
- In most provinces environmental guidelines exist or are under development relating to forest biomass harvesting and the restriction of biomass removal from ecologically sensitive areas.
- Wood residues should continue to be the primary source of forest biomass. Standing trees are

harvested for biomass only when they do not have a “higher-value” market and where replanting can take place that will add value to the overall forest.

Bioenergy is an integral part of the future. The emerging bio-economy is capable of producing biochemicals and bioproducts that further decrease the overall dependence on oil. What we need is to foster a consensus on the “best practices” for industry development that provide for environmental, economic and societal benefits for our generation and those following. Canbio will act as a catalyst for building such a consensus and invites all those interested to join in the process.