

Methane makes sense!

Author: Gareth Chadwick, MindsinMotion.net<gareth.chadwick@mindsinmotion.net>

After biofuels' recent battering in the media and in various studies, a UK and Belgium-based sustainable transport company says we should forget about growing crops specifically for biofuel and switch our attention to biomethane instead.

The company in question, Sustraco, develops and installs sustainable and environmentally sound transport systems based on Ultra Light Rail technology. Its recent comments add to the debate surrounding large-scale biofuels production.

"Painful process"

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"The UK needs to start building up renewable resources to replace fossil fuels – which will be a painful process," says Sustraco Chairman James Skinner. "Sweden, for instance, is way ahead on this with some 40 per cent of energy coming from renewable resources, compared with the UK's meagre 2 per cent."

Biomethane as "main alternative"

However, Skinner's main point is that the answer to fossil fuel replacement is not in cultivating crops for biofuels. Instead, he suggests that the land already given over to the cultivation of crops for biofuels should be dedicated to food, and biomethane – a product of the anaerobic digestion of organic matter – should be used as the main alternative green fuel for transport.

"There is no way we can afford to waste valuable land and water on feeding cars instead of people," Mr. Skinner explains. "But organic waste and sewage could be used to produce biomethane for fuel, with the resulting by-products useful as a replacement for artificial fertilisers derived from fossil fuels. It is essential that these materials are recycled anyway, in order to capture and use the methane they would otherwise emit into the atmosphere, where it causes 25 times more damage than carbon as a greenhouse gas. At the same time, we could divert the massive funds that are going into finding and exploiting more fossil fuels into renewable energy."

Have your say

He makes a convincing argument – but surely there's a biofuel boffin out there who can pick him up on some of these themes?