

EBA AGRICULTURE WG

Conference call 25th November 2020.

Minutes

Welcoming of the Chair Michel Niederbacher

The meeting started at 10:00 and EBA Agriculture WG Chair MN welcomed all the participants

Approval of the agenda and approval of the minutes of last meeting

Participants approved the minutes of the last meeting.

Participants approved the agenda of the meeting which included the following points:

1. Exchange of views about a position paper on biogas enabling carbon farming
2. Exchange of views on an infographic for environmental benefits of cover crops
3. Exchange of views on an article on the cascading use of biomass
4. Exchange of views of the revision of the Common Agricultural Policy

1. Exchange of views about a position paper on biogas enabling carbon farming

Participants could answer several questions that were drafted to promote the discussion. In the first question, participants could express their preference on the functioning of carbon farming. Some of them preferred a system of rules prescribing the agriculture and management practices to be implemented. While others preferred setting a goal – e.g. tonnes of CO₂ sequestered per year per hectare – and leaving freedom to achieve the goal applying different practices.

It was suggested to start working on studying and calculating the carbon contribution of crops, digestate and eventually other inputs.

After the exchange of views, it was decided that a written consultation between members is needed to collect all different views and build a solid shared understanding. Based on the input, an initial draft of a position could be developed and further discussed.

It is important for EBA to have a clear position and take part in the discussion on carbon farming that is already ongoing and that will become a core topic in 2021.

Marco Giacomazzi will forward the questions to the participants of the working group to collect their feedback.

Note of the editor: EBA will use the collected answer only to draft a common position on carbon farming. All the collected feedback will remain available for the exclusive use of the European Biogas Association. Individual comments and answers cannot be shared with the participants of the WG nor with other EBA members or third party, unless explicitly authorized by the author.

2. Exchange of views on an infographic for environmental benefits of cover crops

Michael Niederbacher presented a draft infographic that shows the positive carbon cycle of biomethane from agriculture (production) to the consumption. After an exchange of views and since the participants are not experts in visual communications it was suggested to involve EBA comms team.

3. Exchange of views on an article on the cascading use of biomass

The discussion energy vs. food should be avoided, according to most of the participants. It would be a lost discussion and we do not have the resources to address it. Nevertheless, EBA should not avoid advocating the importance of biogas and biomethane in agriculture, agreed the participants.

The participants showed interest in the economic opportunities that renewable gas offers to farmers and rural areas.

The European Commission will adopt in 2021 the communication “Long-term vision for rural areas” and we hope that it will acknowledge the importance of renewable gas.

4. Exchange of views of the revision of the Common Agricultural Policy

The participants acknowledged that in the current proposal, bioenergy can be financed either through “investments” (second pillar).

It is not sure whether cover crops can be funded under conditionality or eco-schemes that are the main green payments under the first pillar. It will be important to monitor the developments both at EU level and at Member State level during 2021.

Participants:

Michael Niederbacher, TerraX & EBA

Marco Giacomazzi EBA

Anna Virolainen-Hynna, Finnish Biogas Association

Cyril Flamin, Engie

Julia Muench, German Biogas Association

Stefan Rau, German Biogas Association

Konstantinos Alexandridis, Hellenic Biogas Association

Minna Leppikorpi

Paddy Phelan

Sean Finnan, Irish Bioenergy Association

Emilie Bondoerffer, AAMF

Sandra Esteves, University of South Wales

Esther Busscher, SHV Bioenergy

Oliver Jende, ETW Energietechnik GmbH

Victor Thevenet, GRDF

Guido Bezzi, CIB

Annex – Questions for the participants (carbon farming)

Disclaimer #1: Carbon farming is a name for a variety of agricultural methods aimed at increasing soil's carbon content either by sequestering atmospheric carbon into the soil or by adding external inputs that are rich in carbon. Such as digestate, compost, biochar manure, etc.

Disclaimer #2: a standardised carbon accounting methodology to monitor and verify the authenticity of carbon removals is lacking. However, different approaches and tools already exist. The European Commission will propose a common mechanism in June 2021 when it will adopt its proposals to revise the climate legislation (ETS, LULUCF and ESR)

Disclaimer #3: the European Commission will set a mandatory target on carbon removals for 2035: 500 million tonnes of CO₂ sequestered and removed by 2035. The actual target is 300 million tonnes of CO₂ by 2030.

Disclaimer #4: To incentivise carbon farming, the European Commission wants to issue carbon credits and certificates to the farmers and landowners who managed to sequester CO₂. The credits can be traded. Industrial emitters can buy carbon credits to offset their emissions, just as they do within the ETS.

- How do you prefer that the carbon farming works in the future? Do you prefer a mechanism based on rules or do you prefer a mechanism based on performance? For instance, do you prefer a fixed set of rules and practices? Or do you prefer that an overall target is set and that farmers can implement different strategies to achieve the target?
- Do you think that is possible to do carbon farming if you harvest your crops? Do you think that it is possible to do carbon farming with energy crops in the crop rotation? Do you think that it is possible to do carbon farming with the cover crops?
- What is the best AD feedstock if I want that my digestate is rich in organic carbon? Bio-waste from household? Bio-waste from industry? Energy crops? Other vegetable residues? Algae? Sewage sludge? Others?
- On top of digestate, what other sources of organic matter and organic carbon are good for soil? Compost? Unprocessed manure? Biochar? Green manures? Should EBA support the alternatives to digestate?