

Bioenergy could provide a future

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The bioenergy sector points to the opportunities for farmers to offset agriculture's greenhouse gas emissions in their submission to the Government on proposals for inclusion of agriculture within the emissions trading scheme.

"The opportunities for farmers to offset their biological emissions is available now and uses proven technologies such as wood fuel from shelterbelts and woodlots, and producing energy from farm wastes. Including agriculture within the emissions trading scheme can have upsides which can provide new business opportunities for farmers," said the Bioenergy Association.

The Bioenergy Association says there is a big future for utilisation of biomass for energy and farmers can gain from that by becoming food plus fuel producers.

The association's executive officer Brian Cox says "bioenergy will play an expanding part in New Zealand's energy mix with the result that

climate action shouldn't necessarily come at the expense of economy or living standards".

He says "the proposed emissions reduction targets are challenging but will lead to more use of biomass for energy. Companies such as Fonterra, Danone and DB Breweries, as well as Christchurch and Dunedin hospitals are committed

to using biomass fuels. To meet the demand for that fuel farmers in the right location should be looking to see how they can provide wood fuel from shelterbelts, woodlots and otherwise unproductive steep slopes etc."

If farmers start using waste wood to produce an energy fuel they will be well prepared for future expansion to provide feedstock for the production of transport biofuels and the bio-based materials that are starting to replace plastics.

Brian Cox, executive officer of the Bioenergy Association said, " The Government proposals will open up opportunities for farmers to offset biological emissions from livestock. Currently only the liability is counted and there is little recognition of the very significant carbon absorption that farmers already do. With a better regulatory framework, as is proposed by the Government, farmers will get recognition of the wide range of sustainable agricultural initiatives they have available."

"The wood from shelterbelts and crop residues such as from maize can be treated and sold as a solid biofuel to replace coal and gas for process heat.

"Currently many of the biomass fuel options available on farms are outside the emission trading scheme rules and farmers therefore get no credit for what they can already do.

"Processing of dairy effluent and food wastes by anaerobic digestion provides biogas which can be used to produce on-farm electricity, heating and cooling and can be used as a fuel in farm vehicles.

Bioenergy in the news

"The bio-fertiliser also produced can be used to replace inorganic fertilisers, thus reducing emissions from fertiliser use."

Cox said, "the adoption of agricultural solutions for climate change will also broaden farm revenue sources and improve farm business resilience.

"All of these opportunities use proven technologies and can be implemented prior to 2025. However the proposal for a farm-level incentive scheme to reward early adopters who do reduce their emissions needs to start as soon as possible if that target date is to be achieved.

"Similarly the proposal to increase investment in research and development to expand the tool box and technologies available to farmers to calculate and reduce their emissions needs to start now."

He said it "is the current lack of recognition and of incentives that are holding farmers back from farming according to circular economy principles and thus off-setting biological emissions.

"Adoption of the Government's proposals overcome that barrier."

Cox said "shelterbelts and woodlots can produce around 2 PJ of energy, and that is a 10th of the amount of coal currently used for process heat, so would be a significant contribution from farmers to reducing national greenhouse gases".

He said "it is great that the Government proposals provide for recognition of what many farmers are already doing but not being recognised for.

"Inclusion of agriculture within the emissions trading scheme as proposed by Government can be good for farmers and communities.

Appropriate proactive climate change policies can have a very positive upside to communities and the economy."

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