European Biogas Association
Rue d'Arlon 63-65
B-1040 Brussels, Belgium
+ 32 (0) 2 00 1089
info@european-biogas.eu

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EBA Position on sustainable European future: European Union action for sustainability

The European biogas sector brings along a wide range of benefits to revitalise rural areas by jobs and innovation as well to make the farming sector more sustainable. We briefly outline our statements and positions on the following topics below:

- **Sustainable energy** - Biogas is the 3rd fastest-growing renewable energy source worldwide, behind photovoltaic and wind, at an average annual growing rate of 13.2% between 1990 and 2014 (IEA Renewables Information Report 2016). Taken AD and gasification together, a conservative estimate for the total production of biomethane equivalent in 2030 is 48 billion Nm^3 per year, in other words a combined renewable energy production of 1700 PJ and 62,5 million tonnes of CO_{2eq} savings for the entire EU-28. **The European Union should prepare long-term policies and research to support innovation of renewable energy in Europe: long-term support schemes and (ambitious) RES targets for 2030, 2040 and 2050 combined with targets phasing out fossil fuels.**

- **Sustainability and CAP** – anaerobic digestion is a part of sustainable farming and Common Agricultural Policy: when respecting the minimum growing periods and requirements of wildlife and biodiversity, the crops grown on ecological focus areas should be allowed to be used under restricted conditions as biogas feedstock providing ecological and economic profitability for farmers. Digesting the plant helps to avoid negative impacts: mitigate around 50% of the greenhouse gas emissions and avoid nutrient leakage, both taking place during the plant's rotting process. Additionally, green energy is produced alongside digestate that is an excellent organic fertiliser closing the nutrients cycle and bringing back valuable amounts of carbon. **Digestion of numerous ecologically useful mixtures of plants should therefore be qualified as Ecological Focus Areas in the Common Agricultural Policy (under restricted conditions).**

- **Quality of air, water and soil** - Anaerobic digestion is a key waste management technology that handles different organic materials, so as to minimise their impact on water (e.g. nitrogen leakage) and to the atmosphere (methane). A sustainable application and a suitable combination of biogas crops (catch and cover crops) help to achieve the following advantages: break up of soil compaction, minimizing water and wind erosion, build-up of nutrient storage, feeding of soil organisms, weed suppression, build-up of humus, fixing of atmospheric nitrogen and the preservation of soil health and fertility. **Anaerobic digestion should be part (a measure) of European sustainable farming requirements. The European Union should develop a specific policy to mitigate methane emissions (one of the most powerful GHG).**

- **Animal husbandry** - The management of livestock manure in agriculture emits 1.5% of the world's total GHG emissions. A large proportion of this manure can be recovered and digested, thereby avoiding methane emissions from open storage in tanks or lagoons. Several EU countries already lead the way on manure digestion (FAO Global Livestock Environmental Assessment Model (GLEAM)). A range of techniques to process manure and certain other animal by-products (ABPs) to minimize GHG emissions and recycle nutrients, are technologically mature. However, roll-out is hindered to date either by regulatory interpretation in some countries, or because economic viability is not achieved because obstacles to placing on the market as fertiliser results in a reduced or negative sale price. **The European Union should develop a specific policy to mitigate methane emissions (one of the most powerful GHG). Harmonise the European fertilizer legislations by properly including organic fertilisers in the scope of the new Fertiliser Regulation (see** EBA's position on the revision of the Fertilisers Regulation**), exclude digestate from registration efforts under REACH and set out end step for digested ABP material within ABP regulation.**

- **Employment** – the biogas sector employs more than 70,000 people in Europe (Eurostat). Presumably, more than a half of the jobs can be found in rural areas since 69% of biogas plants in Europe are agricultural (EBA statistical report 2016). **To fight poverty in rural areas, the European Cohesion Policy should explicitly support further deployment of innovative technologies such as anaerobic digestion in the European countryside.**

- **Food and food waste** – anaerobic digestion is the technology which currently delivers the most benefit from organic wastes and crops, extracting energy whilst recycling the nutrients and organic matter. Cover and catch crops grown for biogas production can be integrated into food crop rotations, thus improving the overall productivity of farming and providing preceding crop value and soil quality improvements. **Sustainability of biogas should be addressed in a comprehensive way: not only whether crops are used or not but *how* they are used. The new Waste Framework Directive must include an obligatory target for separate collection and recycling organic waste (preferably done by anaerobic digestion or composting) and set out a ban on incineration of organic waste everywhere in the European Union to close the loop of nutrients recycling.**

- **Keep on track:** Renewable energy technologies experience a positive and fast development within European Union. Anaerobic digestion is mainly driven by small companies, research programs and innovative farmers while other renewables are driven mainly by already mature and big industries which can effort their own research. **Creating further development and keeping European Union as technology leader needs further efforts on research programs and robust and stable policy framework.**