

EU agrees plan to cap use of food-based biofuels

June 13 2014



A customer holds a petrol pump nozzle providing biofuel E10 in Hamburg, northern Germany, on March 4, 2011

The European Union agreed Friday to limit the bloc's use of biofuels made directly from agricultural products after criticism they push up food prices and add to pollution.

Ministers from the 28-nation bloc overcame a year-long deadlock to

agree a reduction in the use of 'first generation' biofuels, which are made from crops such as corn, beetroot or rapeseed.

The new deal will cap the use of fuel made from food products to 7.0 percent of transport sector energy use by 2020, down from an original target set in 2009 of 10 percent.

The EU has been a leader in driving the takeup of fuels made from crops—so-called first-generation biofuels—to replace fossil fuels like oil in a bit to cut [global carbon emissions](#).

But Brussels faces mounting criticism that mandating the use of such biofuels has eaten away at global food supplies, pushing up prices in some of the world's poorest countries.

Critics also argue the conversion of land to grow biofuels, particularly in the peaty mangrove swamps of Southeast Asia, means they are not the environmental panacea the EU has touted them to be.

The European Commission, the EU's executive, originally backed a 5.0 percent limit and acknowledged Friday's was weaker than hoped.

"But better this than no decision at all," EU Energy Commissioner Guenther Oettinger said.

Activists, however, said the deal would not be enough to limit the impact of biofuels on the world's increasingly tight food supply as the global population increases.

"Today's deal on biofuels is a brazen assault on common sense," Marc-Olivier Herman, Oxfam's EU biofuels expert said.

"In a starving world, phasing out the use of [food](#) for fuel is the only

sensible thing to do," he said.

The measure now goes to the European Parliament, which is pushing for a 6.0 percent limit.

Italian Energy Minister Claudio de Vicenti, whose country takes over the EU's rotating presidency next month, admitted its passage "will be difficult".

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Citation: EU agrees plan to cap use of food-based biofuels (2014, June 13) retrieved 18 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-06-eu-cap-food-based-biofuels.html>

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