



RTFO biofuels benefits

Carbon savings

Virtually all biofuels offer some carbon savings, because the CO₂ that is emitted into the atmosphere when they are burned is offset by the amount the crop has absorbed as it grows. In this sense they are different from fossil fuels, which emit into the atmosphere carbon which has been safely locked away under the earth's surface for millions of years.

The carbon savings from biofuels is, however, offset by the energy that is needed for cultivation, harvesting, processing and transportation.

The best biofuels are those which are produced using the least energy (eg low inputs of fertiliser, processed in an energy-efficient way and transported short distances).

The worst biofuels can result in greater lifecycle carbon emissions than fossil fuels (ie more energy is needed to produce them than is saved by using them). As a rule of thumb, most biofuels offer a carbon saving of something like 50 per cent compared to fossil fuels.

So, if we were to achieve five per cent biofuel sales in the UK, we would deliver a carbon saving from road transport of 2.5 per cent - equivalent to around 0.7 - 0.8 million tonnes of carbon, which is much the same thing (in carbon terms) as taking a million cars off the road.

Diversity of energy supply

Biofuels get us away from 100 per cent dependency on fossil fuels. In the longer term, it is possible that biofuels might make up as much as 20-30 per cent of total fuel sales, although estimates of the total global capacity for biofuels vary widely.

Benefits for the rural economy

This is why biofuels are so popular in the US, Brazil and much of the rest of the EU.

However UK feedstocks generally cost more (especially compared to Brazilian bioethanol), so UK farmers may only benefit when/if cheaper imports become less available owing to growing global demand. Some countries' support is carefully targeted at domestic production.