

# The Bioethics of Bioenergy

**Seminar organized in association with the Finnish Association of Parliament Members and Scientists (TUTKAS) on November 17, 2009 at The Finnish Parliament (The Little Parliament)**



During recent years the interest in developing alternative sources for renewable energy has increased dramatically. Different sources of bioenergy have been suggested and renewable energy is now being promoted as an alternative to fossil fuels. The large-scale production and consumption of bioenergy raises, however, a host of ethical issues.

The meeting focused on both the challenges and possibilities that bioenergy production and use offer in relation to climate change. Speakers at the seminar presented different dimensions related to the production and use of different types of bioenergy, the impact they may have on the environment and consumer choices, as well as the direction and possibilities that ongoing research is offering to development.

A number of speakers discussed the possibilities that the production and use of bioenergy provide for industry, cities, as well as developing countries and rural communities. Industry representatives spoke of the way in which bioenergy is being utilised in a number of ways to offset the use of fossil fuels. Some of the future technologies that are being developed include the production and use of algae in the production of biofuels. Other interesting developments include the possibilities that the production and use of bioenergy offer for rural communities in developing countries in achieving increased fuel self-sufficiency.

At the same time, however, a number of challenges remain in making different forms of bioenergy “green”. The burning of biofuels always produces small particle emissions which are dangerous to the health and may increase respiratory problems if not controlled for. The evaluation of the efficiency of bioenergy should be based on the whole “life-cycle” of the production chain in order to better understand the carbon foot print of a given product. In addition the production of bioenergy crops, for example, may offset land use for food production, as well as increase the destruction of valuable rain forests.

The use of bioenergy to offset the consumption of fossil fuels offers many different opportunities and technologies which can be better exploited in the future. The development of these technologies, however, should take into better account the whole life cycle of the production chain, as well as the consequences that the use of these forms of energy will have when produced and used on a large scale.

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The meeting was attended by 130 participants including parliamentarians, government officials, representatives from industry as well as NGO's.

*Presentations from the conference can be found on the homepage for the Nordic Committee on Bioethics [http://www. ncbio.org/](http://www.ncbio.org/)*

*The Nordic Committee on Bioethics (NCBio) was founded in 1989 to promote Nordic cooperation and exchange of information between scientists, parliamentarians, opinion leaders and public officials in the area of bioethics. NCBio organise yearly public conferences and symposia. The Committee publishes reports and other publications to promote Nordic and international debate on bioethical issues.*

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