

By Liz Gyekye

The green team

The sustainability agenda shows no sign of abating

Finnish company UPM has recently signed up to become an RSB member – a global standard and certification scheme for sustainable production of biomaterials and biofuels. Here, *Liz Gyekye* catches up with Maiju Helin, senior manager responsible for Safety, Sustainability and Quality at UPM Biofuels to discuss its green agenda.



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What steps did UPM take to become a RSB member?

UPM has already for many years been following RSB closely both in terms of monitoring the development of the standard and also taking part in RSB-related discussions, for example in RSB annual assemblies. UPM has also continuously been active with NGO's like WWF (World Wide Fund for Nature) to promote the sustainability aspects around biofuel certification. Last year, UPM took its final steps to become a RSB member. In addition to

the membership, we are now in the process of finalising RSB certification. RSB certification verifies that we have all the sustainability, health, safety and environmental management practises in place to comply with RSB requirements. Although we develop our approach continuously and make internal audits regularly, the certification process has provided us a good chance to cross-check the level of our performance in comparison to the RSB standards.

What is set to be the next biggest trend in sustainability?

UPM sees the topic of lifecycle greenhouse gas emission reduction remaining an important issue on the climate change agenda. However, robust sustainability criteria for the origin of biomass-based feedstocks together with traceability of supply chains are things that will become more and more important in the future. This will also be important for products outside the biofuel market. Additionally, end users are more and more interested in the social responsibility aspects of the supply chain, encouraging producers to consider sustainability from a wider perspective.

Why did you pick this scheme to join?

UPM promotes sustainability from many angles. UPM holds ISCC-EU and ISCC-PLUS voluntary certificates for its BioVerno renewable diesel and naphtha and is finalising RSB

certification. The ISCC and RSB schemes are seen as the two strongest sustainability certification schemes, both having their own strengths and emphasis. ISCC Plus, for example, enabled us to open the bioplastics market segment for our wood-based renewable naphtha. Being able to show compliance with both schemes is even stronger evidence of sustainability in all UPM Biofuel operations.

What do you think of the argument that voluntary sustainability schemes should be made mandatory?

We find that in most of Europe, voluntary scheme certificates are already a mandatory requirement in cases where one wants to sell biofuels from one Member State to another. However, many Member States have applied additional measures to verify the sustainability of imported biofuels. As the original target of the voluntary schemes was to align requirements across the EU, it is important that any scheme accepted by the EU Commission would also be accepted as such by all Member States.

What can be done to convince the public about the sustainability of biofuels and the part they should play in a low-carbon world post 2020?

I truly believe that we need all possible ways to reduce the transport sector's emissions in the long term. To that end, advanced, sustainable biofuels will have a significant role to

play. In the longer term, the focus of biofuels will move from passenger vehicles to heavy duty transport, the marine sector and aviation. It goes without saying that sustainability of the feedstock must be robust for the puzzle to play out, and I'm convinced that is doable. The usage of traditional biofuels competing with food production has already been limited and post 2020 legislation proposals seem very positive for advanced fuels, such as our wood-based BioVerno products. Renewable drop-in fuels that significantly reduce both CO₂ and tail pipe emissions, such as NO_x and particles, will be favoured. Clear communication on the differences between the emission performances of different types of fuels will play a crucial role in engaging the general public.

What is the biggest challenge you face?

Unharmonised characteristics of the biofuel markets and regulation between countries, also within EU, is a big challenge for any biofuel player who wants to export its products.

What next for UPM Biofuels?

UPM actively seeks growth in sustainable and scalable biofuel production. Last autumn, a separate development program was launched to investigate the best possible strategy and growth options for us in terms of raw materials, technologies and commercial solutions. ●