

SPEECH BY THE LINNEBORN PRIZE WINNER 2007

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Mr. Chairman and distinguished Guests, thank you for the honour of awarding me this prize.

We have congregated at these conferences on 14 previous occasions to share our knowledge and experience on biomass and bioenergy, in many locations across Europe, including once before in this Congress Centre. While Europe is bigger than in 1980, the importance of biomass and bioenergy is now far greater and we need to take better advantage of the opportunities offered if bioenergy is going to deliver its promises.

Biomass is a unique resource with a distinguished past. It is the only renewable source of fixed carbon and hence the only renewable source of most fuels and all organic chemicals.

Biomass has been an energy resource for tens of thousand of years since man discovered fire. Wood, dung and a range of materials were increasingly used until the middle ages when the potential problems of deforestation were only averted with the discovery of firstly coal which led to the industrial revolution; and then oil and gas; and finally nuclear power.

As our societies became more industrialised, biomass became a valuable commodity for products such as paper, timber and fabric polymers, with only developing countries relying on wood as a fuel. Again in those areas, problems of resource depletion have arisen in many areas.

Problems of sustainability continue, with the loss of rain forests on the global scale and over-farming of fuel wood in less developed areas at the local level.

We are now faced with the challenge of ensuring that the massive biomass requirements that are predicted and promised to meet future demands are truly sustainable.

Just growing lots of biomass is only part of the opportunity. We must develop crops with the optimum characteristics for conversion to energy products that we can readily use and need. And we must ensure that everyone benefits, not just help us in Europe, but also to contribute to new opportunities for employment, investment, business and trade in many other areas of the world.

We now have the challenge to match the potential of biomass to the hungry demands of a society with a seemingly almost insatiable appetite for energy. In principle, biomass can satisfy all our demands for food, energy and materials, but how can we achieve this?

This brings us back to here and now.

We are all aware of the potentially catastrophic climate changes that are predicted from global warming and also aware of the increasingly urgent need to reduce fossil fuel emissions through use of renewable energy.

Biomass is widely recognised as the largest potential contributor to mitigating global warming and uniquely offers the whole world the opportunity to contribute to the production of biomass, as well as benefiting from its utilisation.

Those involved in conversion or upgrading biomass into more useful and more valuable energy forms also have a responsibility to maximise performance, minimise costs and optimise environmental impact. And this is where the majority of you are working judging by the proportion of papers and posters in the conversion area.

These European Energy from Biomass conferences have played a pivotal role in developing Europe's bioenergy interests by bringing researchers and industry together to accelerate the exploitation of this renewable resource.

We are gathered here for the 15th time for some of us, since Brighton in 1980, to review the progress made in the science and technology of biomass production, conversion to useful products and utilisation of those products. Now there are 1500 or more delegates at the largest event of its kind in the world, compared to the 150 or so in Brighton.

And we are here to contribute to the growth of bioenergy by sharing our knowledge, by cooperating on new ideas, by helping industry exploit the potential of bioenergy and by helping researchers to identify and resolve scientific and technological problems.

That is our individual and collective responsibility.

So in conclusion, my main messages are:

- Sustainability is an essential component of a bioenergy driven society
- Biomass production needs to address both global and local needs. It needs to be delivered to users whatever they will utilise it for, with the right characteristics and at the right price
- Those involved with conversion to higher value commodities or specialities must work with the producers to optimise the bioenergy chain in terms of maximum performance, minimum cost and minimum environmental impact.
- The energy industry needs to embrace the new products and help all of us working in the bioenergy area to meet the market demands and promise of this exciting technology.
- By positive and healthy collaboration and cooperation we can move bioenergy forwards more quickly and more successfully.

Ladies and Gentleman, thank you.