Press release

Biogas Convention 2018 – Great potential and huge challenges

+++ International Biogas Convention from 14 – 16 Nov. 2018 in Hanover +++ Restructuring activities in the home country of biogas utilisation +++ Europe is catching up +++

Freising, Germany. At the 28th BIOGAS Convention from 14 – 16 Nov. 2018 at the trade fair grounds in Hanover, the German biogas sector is presenting itself as “flexible, safe and future-oriented”. "Even though the framework conditions on the German biogas market are currently difficult, industry players are cautiously optimistic about the future", says the President of the German Biogas Association, Horst Seide, reassuringly.

Like every year, the focus of the convention programme reflects industry circumstances: the legal framework is just as relevant to German market participants as are topics like processing biogas to produce biomethane, fertilising and hygiene, reducing emissions for CHP systems, as well as innovations and concepts for the future. Increasingly, however, the focus is shifting towards the utilisation of biogas outside of the German domestic market: two panel presentations and two workshops will be held entirely in English.

The trade fair EnergyDecentral is taking place on the trade fair grounds in Hanover at the same time as the BIOGAS Convention. About 200 members of the Association are presenting their numerous innovations there.

It is clear that the German biogas industry is in a transition stage. In three years, the initial operators of biogas plants will be faced with the end of the twenty-year payment guarantee provided by the Renewable Energy Act (EEG). Although the current EEG 2017 includes an option for receiving subsequent payments for another ten years, conditions are not very good and procedures are difficult: In tendering procedures, operators of biogas plants can bid with regard to a specific amount of electrical power – the lowest bids are awarded contracts.

However, response to the first two rounds of tendering in 2017 and 2018, was unenthusiastic. Of the advertised electrical power output of 225 megawatts (MW) this year, only 77 MW were offered in 79 bids. "The tendering procedure poses new challenges for the operators", explains Seide. "Many operators are still waiting and prefer to remain in their existing payment scheme as long as possible instead of switching to EEG 2017 now. Above all, for many the cap specified in EEG 2017, at a maximum of 16.8 eurocents per kilowatt hour for existing plants, is too low to make further operation worthwhile.

Nevertheless, there is still interest in the industry and a basic willingness to continue. Seide is certain that "in the future, biogas plants will not produce electricity 24 hours a day”. "It would be a waste, because biogas can do much more and, it should be used with flexibility and in line with demand". Nearly half of approximately 9,300 biogas plants with a total capacity about 3,000 megawatts (MW) have already been converted for flexible operation.

In the future biogas plants will no longer be economically viable based on electricity sales alone. Many plants have an outstanding heating design and supply houses, schools, and swimming pools in the neighbourhood with climate friendly heating. But in most cases, the price per kilowatt hour of heat is much too low because fossil-based alternatives are too cheap. "Improvements are needed here", explains the President.

Seide sees a great future for biogas in processing: For example, if it is refined into biomethane and fed into the gas grid, biogas can be used as a climate friendly fuel. Across Europe there are about 500 feed-in plants; 200 of
these are located in Germany. With the current diesel scandals and driving bans in some cities, more and more people are interested in climate friendly fuel alternatives.

In comparison with a petrol operated vehicle, one that runs on biomethane produces up to 90 percent less greenhouse gases. In Europe there are currently about 3,500 CNG (compressed natural gas) filling stations. 900 of which are in Germany; at some of those, vehicles can be filled with pure biomethane, at others, the fuel is a mixture of biomethane and natural gas. "In future, biogas will play an important role in the fuel sector", says the Association President confidently.

Moreover, high quality fertiliser is produced during fermentation in biogas plants, which has sparked great interest in both agriculture and gardening operations. The current brochure "Fertilising with fermentation products" (German "Düngen mit Gärprodukten", www.digestate-as-fertilizer.com) provides a comprehensive overview of this alternative, potential marketing method. The brochure is a cooperative production of the German Biogas Association together with the German Association for International Cooperation (GIZ) GmbH, the Indian Biogas Association (IBA), and the European Compost Network (ECN) e.V., with the financial support of the German Federal Ministries for Economic Affairs and for Economic Cooperation and Development.

The biogas sector can and must move in new directions. In the long run, operating a biogas plant will never be worthwhile based on the price of electricity alone. "The world market leader is taking the next step in biogas utilisation", says Horst Seide. "Biogas 2.0". The Association President is certain that without biogas, the energy transition will not succeed and it will not be possible to reach the goal of limiting global warming to less than 1.5 degrees Celsius.

"Biogas offers so much potential worldwide. Now we have to do our homework here in Germany in order to demonstrate that it is possible and how it can work".

www.biogas-convention.com

www.digestate-as-fertilizer.com

About the German Biogas Association [Fachverband Biogas e.V.]
Fachverband Biogas e.V. represents the biogas industry in the German Renewable Energy Federation (BEE) e.V. It is Europe’s largest advocacy organisation for the biogas sector and counts more than 4,700 members, including operators, manufacturers and planners of biogas plants as well as representatives from science and industry. www.biogas.org/EN

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