

Press release

Fuel from straw: Claus Sauter, CEO of VERBIO, swaps his Management Board office for the baler

Pinnow/Schwedt, August 11, 2020 – Claus Sauter, CEO of VERBIO Vereinigte BioEnergie AG, lends a hand and helps with the straw harvest in Brandenburg. In doing so he wants to underline the importance of agriculture to the energy and transport turnaround, and send a clear signal for regional value-added chains. VERBIO, a leading biofuels manufacturer, uses the straw to manufacture biomethane, a biofuel for use in passenger vehicles and heavy goods vehicles powered by CNG fuel.

In Germany's agriculture industry alone up to 20 million tonnes of straw remain unused annually, representing a significant quantity of raw material for the manufacture of fuel. This volume is sufficient to fuel up to 10 million passenger vehicles or approximately 200,000 heavy goods vehicles. The fermentation residues from manufacturing biomethane are used as high-quality biofertiliser in agriculture, and help to ensure a balanced soil structure.

VERBIO buys its straw from farmers in the region more or less direct from the field immediately after the harvest. After that, the VERBIO team based at the service centre in Heinersdorf, near Schwedt begin harvesting the straw. Using the most up-to-date techniques the fields are worked one by one in order to press the straw into large bales weighing 500kg, which are then loaded for transport and brought to the VERBIO plants in and around Schwedt.

VERBIO's CEO Claus Sauter never misses an opportunity to take part in the harvest personally and to run the baler across the fields himself. This year, he is clearly satisfied: "The harvest in our collection areas was good. The farmers are happy, and we have been able to secure sufficient raw materials of the quality required for our production purposes."

CO₂ neutral with #StrawinTank

The technology used by VERBIO to manufacture biomethane from 100 percent straw is unique worldwide, and has been developed internally by the Group. It opens up a potential use of this raw material for which there was no alternative use, without competing with food production for land use. The Group has been operating a plant producing biofertilizer and biomethane from 100 percent straw in Schwedt in Brandenburg since 2014, and a further plant in neighbouring Pinnow since 2019.

"We currently have capacity to manufacture 750 GWh of biomethane annually. With this, VERBIO AG alone is in a position to manufacture 30 percent of the CNG fuel that is consumed in Germany," stressed Claus Sauter. There are further straw biomethane production plants currently under construction in India and in the USA.

"The recent extension of the toll exemptions for low-emission heavy goods vehicles – including heavy goods vehicles powered by CNG fuels – and the increase in the greenhouse gas reduction quota proposed by the Federal Government mean that we can now again see positive framework conditions to consider the possible construction of additional plants in Germany," added Sauter.

VERBIO Vereinigte BioEnergie AG

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Finally, things are starting to move on this issue. The biomethane share of CNG fuel has increased significantly and is currently around 50 percent. With this, CNG fuel is currently leading the “bio” race. The biofuel share of Germany’s electricity mix used to fuel electric cars is currently only 40 percent. Biomethane also has another advantage: the fuel is also available as a CO₂-neutral alternative for heavy goods transport with an available filling station infrastructure, with vehicles already in mass production with low fuel costs and an appropriate operating range. In this segment, too, “E” is currently not competitive.

Next year Claus Sauter will again not miss the opportunity to take part in the straw harvest in the fields of Brandenburg and Western Poland. “I grew up in an agricultural family business, and I have not forgotten my roots. It is a lot of fun to sit on such a modern straw press and to be outside in the fields, being part of it all,” said the Chairman of the Management Board.

Photographic and video material is available on request.

Information about VERBIO Vereinigte BioEnergie AG (VERBIO)

VERBIO Vereinigte BioEnergie AG is one of the leading independent bioenergy manufacturers, and is also the only large-scale producer of biodiesel, bioethanol and biomethane in Europe. The Group has approximately 700 employees at its locations in Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt and Brandenburg as well as at its foreign subsidiaries in India, the USA, Canada, Poland and Hungary. VERBIO concentrates on the use of internally developed innovative technologies and efficient energy-saving production processes. VERBIO’s biofuels achieve CO₂ savings of up to 90 percent compared to petrol or diesel. The Group’s annual production capacity amounts to approximately 660,000 tonnes of biodiesel, 260,000 tonnes of bioethanol and 750 gigawatt hours of biomethane. In addition, VERBIO manufactures biofertiliser and animal feed for agricultural use, as well as high-value raw materials for the pharmaceutical, cosmetic and foodstuff industries. With its innovative processes and highly efficient production plants, VERBIO is a technology leader in the biofuels market. The VERBIO share (ISIN DE000A0JL9W6/WKN A0JL9W) has been listed in the prime standard segment of the Frankfurt Stock Exchange since October 2006.

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