

January 30, 2012 by Salman Zafar

MAJOR OBSTACLES IN INDIA'S BIODIESEL PROGRAM

The unavailability of sufficient feedstock and lack of R&D to evolve high-yielding drought tolerant *Jatropha* seeds have been major stumbling blocks. In addition, smaller land holdings, ownership issues with government or community-owned wastelands, lackluster progress by state governments and negligible commercial production of biodiesel have hampered the efforts and investments made by both private and public sector companies.



Another major obstacle in implementing the biodiesel programme has been the difficulty in initiating large-scale cultivation of *Jatropha*. The *Jatropha* production program was started without any planned varietal improvement program, and use of low-yielding cultivars made things difficult for smallholders. The higher gestation period of biodiesel crops (3-5 years for *Jatropha* and 6-8 years for *Pongamia*) results in a longer payback period and creates additional problems for farmers where state support is not readily available. The *Jatropha* seed distribution channels are currently underdeveloped as sufficient numbers of processing industries are not operating. There are no specific markets for *Jatropha* seed supply and hence the middlemen play a major role in taking the seeds to the processing centres and this inflates the marketing margin.

Biodiesel distribution channels are virtually non-existent as most of the biofuel produced is used either by the producing companies for self-use or by certain transport companies on a trial basis. Further, the cost of biodiesel depends substantially on the cost of seeds and the economy of scale at which the processing plant is operating. The lack of assured supplies of feedstock supply has hampered efforts by the private sector to set up biodiesel plants in India. As of now, only

two firms, Naturol Bioenergy Limited and Southern Online Biotechnologies, have embarked on commercial-scale biodiesel projects, both in the southern state of Andhra Pradesh. In the absence of seed collection and oil extraction infrastructure, it becomes difficult to persuade entrepreneurs to install transesterification plants.

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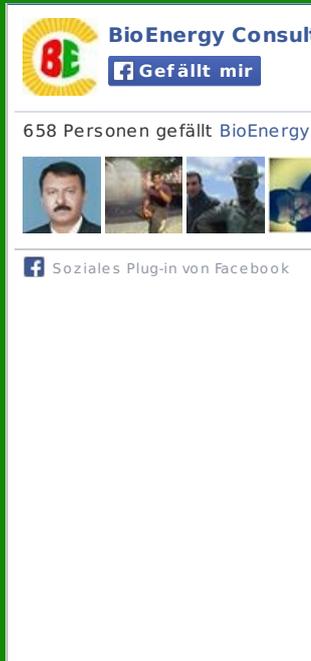


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