**Colombia can supply biodiesel**

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*Intro: Import of sustainable biodiesel from Colombia rescues the rainforest, Norwegian climate targets and peace in the country.*

The government, with support from other political parties, surprised everyone by introducing a compulsory 20 percent blend of biofuels from 2020 in the new state budget, signalling Norway’s intent to improve the national response to climate change. Climatologists have warned against the felling of the Norwegian forest, and other sustainable bioenergy sources in Norway will only cover a fraction of the country’s needs. Imports from developing countries could however be a solution.

Norway celebrated the Nobel Peace Prize for President Santos this past weekend; the first point in the Columbian peace agreement concerns rural development. When the FARC guerrillas lay down their arms the state will again be able to invest in new infrastructure. The Llanos grasslands in eastern Colombia are a tropical plain half the size of Norway, large areas of which are plagued by long term overgrazing. Trees grow naturally almost exclusively along the banks of the river. Nevertheless, the natural conditions are favorable for developing a sustainable modern agricultural sector. There is an abundance of both sun and water, and the earth is fertile when used correctly. Countless development plans for the region have so far failed due to lawlessness and lack of funds. Authorities intend to plant 80,000 square kilometers without affecting the nature reserves and Native American reservations, thus protecting natural forests, marshes and other areas with high diversity.

The peace agreement resolves the violence issues and the European demand for sustainable biodiesel yields investments in infrastructure. A single palm oil plantation can cover all of Norway's needs, and with a long-term purchase agreement it will probably be easy to obtain financing for planting. The prospect of increased tax revenue from agriculture will help justify public investment in roads, rivers, urbanization and social infrastructure. Many environmental organizations are generally skeptical of using soil for biofuels, and the world population is growing and food consumption even more so. Most of today's palm oil comes from the rainforest and methane-generating bogs in Indonesia and Malaysia. Using this land for biofuels forces food production even further into the rainforest.

On the ruined pastures of the Llanos the effect can be the opposite, with increased food production and reduced greenhouse gas emissions. Growth of palm oil trees binds CO2 and new biodiesel replaces fossil fuels. Associated infrastructure and development of the service sector will reduce the cost for food producers as well. Food too will become profitable and they will also be able to establish themselves in the region. New production of rice, fruit, corn, cattle, and especially palm oil for the food industry will be competitive and the pressure on the rainforest may ease. The harvesting of rainforest areas can cease, and the preservaton of the rainforest sustained. On the other hand, lower energy prices result in higher consumption.

Critics claim biofuels from topsoil leads to fewer investments in alternative technologies, but this can be countered with a clear ban once competitive alternatives exist or if precarious food shortages occur in the world. Palm oil can then be used for food instead, or other crops can can be planted on the soil. In reality, biofuels are only a temporary solution that improves the soil on the ruined pastures. Studies from NMBU show that biodiversity increases in palm oil plantations in Colombia compared to on pastures. They warn however that the current cattle farmers might end up moving the animals to other areas, but hopefully the latter will lose ground to more intensive cattle ranching.

Some effects are negative and others are positive, also outside Norway and Colombia. Researchers from HiOA, NMBU and their international partners have applied to the Research Council of Norway for funds to calculate the total effect via ripple effects worldwide.

Norway’s International Climate and Forest Initiative allocated 1.8 billion NOK to forest conservation in Colombia, and organized a seminar with the Colombian environmental and post-conflict ministers from the Peace delegation on December 12, 2016. Hopefully, they will also discuss joint investments in Colombian sustainable biodiesel production so that Norway will be able to achieve its climate commitments. Indirect market mechanisms can be as effective as traditional rainforest conservation, and this will build peace through creating jobs in the countryside. The intention of the peace agreement is to distribute land to peasants. By coordinating them in a network that delivers directly to the biodiesel industry, which also trains its workers, productivity will increase. This will allow for liveable incomes and working conditions. Finally there is an alternative to coca leaves which maintain a violent drug industry.

Rema 1000 brags about keeping palm oil out of store shelves, but this is sustainable product. Reitan[[1]](#footnote-1) undermines both peace and the climate.

1. Reitan is the owner of Rema1000, the main food store chain in Norway, with stores also i Denmark, Polen, and the Baltic countries, [↑](#footnote-ref-1)