



An initiative of the EPFL Energy Center  
*Ensuring that biofuels deliver on their promise of sustainability*

## Roundtable on Sustainable Biofuels: Frequently Asked Questions

### What are biomass, bioenergy and biofuels?

The term *biomass* refers to the biodegradable fraction of products, waste and residues from biological origin (i.e. from agriculture, forestry and related industries including fisheries and aquaculture), as well as the biodegradable fraction of industrial and municipal waste. *Bioenergy* refers to all energy produced from biomass, including biofuels. Bioenergy is used for transport, electricity production, heating, etc. *Biofuels* are any solid, liquid or gaseous fuels produced from biomass.

### What is the Roundtable on Sustainable Biofuels (RSB)?

The RSB is an international initiative hosted within the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne (EPFL), Switzerland. The mission of the RSB is to develop and implement *the RSB Global Sustainability Standard*, a global standard for sustainable production, conversion and use of biomass. More than 120 organizations from nearly 40 countries representing all sectors are registered RSB members. Participation in the RSB is open to any organization working in a field relevant to bioenergy. The RSB will continue to adapt, expand and update the RSB

Standard as technologies and knowledge about bioenergy sustainability evolve.

### What are biofuels' critical sustainability issues?

Biofuels' potential impacts on people and the environment include:

- Degradation of water, air and soils.
- Loss of biodiversity and wildlife habitat
- Infringement of the land and water rights of indigenous peoples
- Unacceptable working conditions and lack of benefit sharing for local communities
- Potential effects on food security
- Increased greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

### What is the RSB Global Sustainability Standard?

The *RSB Global Sustainability Standard* is a universal standard, which describe the requirements for sustainably-produced biofuels and biomass. The standard provides a comprehensive and rigorously-tested basis for the RSB certification system for sustainably-produced biomass and biofuels. The *RSB Global Sustainability Standard* applies to all types of biomass feedstock in every region of the world and at every point of the supply

chain. It provides certainty amid the growing patchwork of voluntary certification schemes and addresses a growing demand for a universal standard – a seal of approval – guaranteeing a biofuels' social and environmental performance.

### How is the RSB Global Sustainability Standard developed?

The RSB standard is developed by our membership of more than 120 organizations worldwide through an open, transparent, and multi-stakeholder process. The RSB governance system gives equal decision-making weight to the private sector, public sector and civil society. Decisions are made by consensus. The governance system of the RSB can be consulted at <http://www.rsb.org>.

### What are the key provisions of the RSB Global Sustainability Standard?

The core of the standard is a set of 12 Principles and Criteria (P&Cs), which define the requirements to achieve sustainable biomass and biofuel production. The P&Cs address:

- Legality
- Impact assessment and stakeholder consultation
- Greenhouse gas emissions

- Human and Labor Rights
- Local Development & Food Security
- Conservation (Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services)
- Soil, Water and Air protection
- Use of hazardous technologies
- Land Rights

The full text of the P&Cs can be consulted at <http://www.rsb.org>.

### **What is the RSB's Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions threshold?**

The RSB has adopted an ambitious threshold of at least a 50% cut in GHG emissions for a blend of biofuels compared to the fossil fuel baseline (e.g. gasoline). In addition, the RSB Standard requires that operators meet any applicable regulatory GHG requirements in the region where they operate (e.g., the EU RED requirements). GHG calculations are made accessible and practical through the *RSB Tool*.

### **How does the RSB handle indirect impacts of biofuel production?**

The RSB Steering Board has recognized this as an important aspect to address by the RSB. An expert group on indirect impacts was formed and continues to discuss the issue; however no consensus was reached on requirements to be included in the Standard at this point.

### **Why and how should my organization become a RSB Member?**

The process of developing and implementing the RSB certification system is made robust and credible by the fact that it is open, consensus-based and multi-stakeholder. RSB

members shape and refine the content and the implementation of the RSB certification system to make it match both their aspirations for sustainable biofuels production and the reality of modern agriculture and industry practices. By becoming a RSB Member, you will join a dynamic group of more than 120 organizations worldwide working together to develop and implement the best possible standard for sustainable biofuel production. Becoming a member is making your voice and your reality count in all further developments of the RSB standards and certification system. To apply for RSB membership, your organization must meet the requirements for participation (i.e. fits into one of the RSB chambers and is engaged in biofuel-related activities) and send a cover letter. All details are available at <http://www.rsb.org>.

### **How much does it cost to become a member of the RSB?**

The fee structure is based on type of organization, and the annual operating budget or turnover of the organization. The membership dues are not intended to be a barrier to participation and organizations that are unable to pay the membership dues may apply for a fee waiver. Depending on its size, a public sector/not-for-profit organization will pay between \$ 250 and \$ 2000, while any other organization will pay between \$ 1000 and \$ 10'000. Membership fees are due annually.

### **Do I have to be an RSB member to gain certification for my biofuels?**

No, RSB membership is appropriate for organizations that would like to be actively involved in the development of the *RSB standards*. The same certification process equally applies to both RSB members and non-members.

### **Is the RSB a member of the ISEAL Alliance?**

RSB has been an Associate Member of the International Social and Environmental Labeling and Accreditation (ISEAL) Alliance since 2009 and on its way towards full membership. ISEAL is the global association for social and environmental standards and works with established and emerging voluntary standard systems to ensure good social and environmental standard-setting processes.

### **Who are the members of the RSB?**

A list of the current RSB members (Chambers and Steering Board) and Secretariat can be found at:

<http://www.rsb.org>

### **How can I contact the RSB?**

Email: [rsb@epfl.ch](mailto:rsb@epfl.ch)

Web: <http://www.rsb.org>

Post:

Roundtable on Sustainable Biofuels

EPFL - Energy Center

Station 5

1015 Lausanne

Switzerland

Telephone: +41 21 693 00 45