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New analysis shows opportunity for power generation from woody biomass

RESEARCH TRIANGLE PARK, NC – The definition of renewable woody biomass is critically important to the Southern region’s ability to qualify for state and federal funding for biomass to energy projects and to meet renewable standards for fuel and power. With over 16 different definitions of woody biomass existing in current legislation and many others in proposed legislation, the Southeast Agricultural & Forestry Energy Resources Alliance (SAFER) commissioned the report, *Implications of Legislative Woody Biomass Definitions*. This report is focused on the impact of alternate woody biomass definitions on the South’s ability to meet a renewable electricity standard (RES).

Two issues surrounding the definition of “renewable woody biomass” that this report addresses are: (1) Concern about the health of the nation’s forests and the potential strain a biopower industry might have on those forests and (2) Concern that a new market for biomass will increase the costs of raw materials for existing wood products industries.

Key findings of the report include:

1. After accounting for the woody biomass that is consumed by traditional industries, 28 percent of the South’s woody biomass inventory is available for biomass to energy development. Of this 28 percent, 63 percent is considered underutilized (i.e. logging residues, slash & brush, plant residues, and salvage).
2. Legislative definitions of woody biomass can significantly reduce the amount of biomass available for energy use. For example, by excluding *naturally* regenerating forests from the list of eligible woody biomass, the available biomass decreases from 28 percent to approximately 12 percent.
3. In a high efficiency scenario of increased plant efficiency and utilization rates, a phased-in 15 to 20 percent standard can be met before competing with traditional timber markets.
4. It is estimated that a theoretical biomass market would only be eight percent of the value of the sawtimber market. Although any change in the market could cause prices to vary, these findings suggest it is unlikely that private landowners will shift their resource from sawtimber to biomass.

Liam Leightley, Chairman of the SAFER Alliance and Executive Director of the Institute of Advanced Learning and Research in Danville, Virginia said, “There is a great opportunity for woody biomass to contribute to the electric power generation in the South. This and other aspects of the bioeconomy will continue to create much needed jobs and guarantee a vibrant wood products industry.”

In addition to the report, the *Woody Biomass & Biomass Definition Database* that was used in the analysis is available upon request for researchers and policymakers to run their own woody biomass scenarios. Users are able to select the parameters they wish to include/exclude and determine their affect on a state’s ability to meet energy standards with woody biomass.

The full report can be found at <http://www.saferalliance.net>.

Register for a free webinar to hear the report authors present their findings at:
<https://southern.ilinc.com/register/wwtpbck>.

About the Southeast Agriculture & Forestry Energy Resources Alliance

The Southeast Agriculture & Forest Energy Resources Alliance (SAFER) is committed to positioning the South as the national leader in the bioeconomy. SAFER works toward this vision by providing strategic leadership in advancing initiatives related to biopower, biofuels, and bioproducts. These initiatives focus on better policy, targeted research, efficient commercialization, and outreach and education. States in the SAFER region are Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. Southern Growth Policies Board is the management and fiscal agent of SAFER. More information about SAFER can be found at www.saferalliance.net.

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