

Assessing demand for cropland for biofuels properly

UFOP: feedstock production for biofuels buffers supply to safeguard global nutrition

Berlin, 7 January 2026. – Crop plants were grown on just over 1.2 billion hectares worldwide in 2024. These include grain, oilseeds, protein, sugar and fibre plants, as well as fruits, vegetables, and nuts. The largest share was used directly or indirectly, via livestock feed, for human nutrition. The cultivation of feedstocks for biofuel production accounted for only about 7 per cent of the cultivated land.

Most biofuels are produced in regions with a structural feedstock surplus, specifically, sugar, maize, palm oil and soybean oil. In the absence of this way of processing, considerable volumes would have to be placed on the world market, which, in turn, would have a negative impact on producer prices globally. In other words, processing these feedstocks into biofuels contributes to reducing surpluses as well as generating additional value added. According to Agrarmarkt Informations-Gesellschaft (mbH), at the same time the use of biofuels reduces the need for imports of crude oil or fossil fuel in many countries.

From the perspective of the Union zur Förderung von Oel- und Proteinpflanzen e. V. (UFOP), another effect of biofuel production is that it also yields high-quality protein feed, which is in high demand, and glycerin for the chemical industry. These volumes and their quality influence commodity prices and therefore also have a bearing on the expansion or reduction of cultivation areas, particularly in the case of soybean. UFOP has stated that biofuels are not a factor driving commodity prices. The corresponding feedstock can be redirected to food use at any time as and when needed. For example, at the beginning of the Russian attack on Ukraine rapeseed oil replaced previously imported sunflower seed oil.

If arable farming were to be intensified for political reasons – an aim the EU Commission is pursuing with the reduction strategy for fertilisers and plant protection products under the Green Deal – this option of "buffering" food demand would no longer be available. UFOP has pointed out that the cultivation area would need to be expanded to close this demand gap. As the European and national bioeconomy strategies are being developed, the focus should shift towards advanced and ambitious concepts for a comprehensive appraisal of commodity chains, starting from plant breeding and cultivation. UFOP has called for a careful orchestration of the full set of tools.



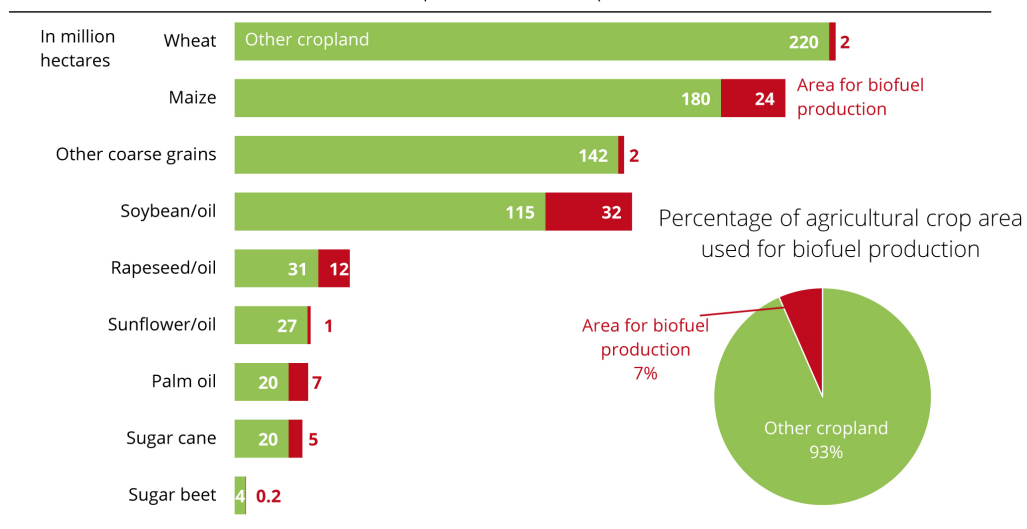
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INFORMATION
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Shares of cultivation area (arable land + permanent crops)
used for selected crops for biofuel production, in 2024



Source: AMI, OECD, USDA, Oil World

Note: other coarse grains = millet, mixed grain, oats

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Quick information on UFOP e. V.:

The Union for the Promotion of Oil and Protein Crops e. V. (UFOP) represents the political interests of companies, associations and institutions involved in the production, processing and marketing of domestic oil and protein crops in national and international bodies. UFOP supports research to optimise agricultural production and for the development of new utilisation possibilities in the food, non-food and feed sectors. UFOP public relations aim to promote the marketing of domestic oil and protein crop end products.