Biofuel a 'one-off chance' for growers

BRIAN HENDERSON

BIOFUEL production could offer Scotland's arable farmers a one-off chance to take some control of their destiny, growers were told this week.

Advising farmers to "take the initiative" and take part in setting up biodiesel processing plants, Mid Scotland and Fife MSP Andrew Arbuckle told a crops conference near Perth: "Biodiesel probably represents the biggest single opportunity for the Scottish farming industry.

"By setting up co-operative processing ventures with local enterprise companies, farmers can control what happens to at least part of their production."

If they did not get involved then once again national and international companies would relegate growers to primary production price takers.

Andrew Barnard, operations director with Grainfarmers was not so sure. He warned that producers should carry out a "warts and all" risk assessment before making a move.

Barnard said: "There is undoubtedly an opportunity, but it will require serious commitment from many business partners to make biodiesel a viable proposition."

British farmers were told to "forget it" if they hoped that their higher production costs, associated with high environmental and animal welfare standards, would be recognised in the current World Trade Organisation talks.

Jim Grueff, who led the US WTO negotiating team until earlier this year, said that such issues were unlikely to figure in any agreement.

He said: "This round of negotiations is proving such a struggle that such issues aren't even likely to be looked at. We hear the same comments coming from our own farmers in the US, but the best we can hope for is that they will resurface for consideration in a future round."

In general, Grueff said, the EU was taking a defensive position in trying to protect the common agricultural policy while the US "is taking a much more offensive approach."

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Last updated: 18-Nov-05 01:00 GMT