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Germany calls for global response to combat climate change

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A series of meetings German government officials held in Berlin Monday with U.S. ag journalists made it clear that Germany is determined to accelerate its already aggressive renewable energy program – and equally determined to recruit the U.S. and Canada as full partners in the effort if possible. This German determination is part of a European Union (EU) commitment to cut greenhouse gas emissions by at least 20% over 1990 levels by 2020 through a 20% cut in EU energy consumption and a 20% increase in renewable energy's share of the energy mix.

German officials insist that the wide range of economic and human health benefits created by cutting greenhouse gas emissions make it well worthwhile for Germany to go it alone if necessary. But Germany also recognizes that benefits – such as already soaring rural employment and a possible end to runaway cancer rates – will come much sooner if there is a well-coordinated international climate change program. In recognition of such benefits, both Germany and the EU as a whole are committed to raising their 20% by 2020 to a full 30% by 2020 “if other industrialized countries make comparable commitments and emerging economies, too, make appropriate contributions.”

So as the U.S. Congress wrestles over climate change legislation, the German government is watching with interest. One reason is the hope that the U.S. will have strong climate legislation in place before the international climate change talks begin in Copenhagen in December. This hope reflects what German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Environment Minister Sigmar Gabriel wrote in Sept. 2008: “Only if we work closely with our partners on the other side of the Atlantic will we succeed in convincing emerging countries such as China, India and Brazil, as well as Russia, to opt for a sustainable growth model that spares the climate.”

German officials explain that a second reason for their interest is that German industry hopes to cash in on its heavy investment in developing new renewable energy technology by increasing German exports to the U.S. of items such as wind turbines and the solar panels which now are standard equipment on many residential, commercial, and industrial buildings throughout Germany.

Foreign Office official Petra Stöckl acknowledges that Germany has a distinct advantage over the U.S. in tackling climate issues: solid consensus within Germany that climate change is a serious human-caused problem which calls for international action to correct the problem. This consensus has led to a remarkably rapid response within Germany, as shown by the fact that between 1998 and 2008, Germany tripled the share of electricity generated from renewable energy from 4.8% to 14.8%. Over the same ten years, Germany has increased the biomass share of that electricity generation from 6.1% to 23.1%, nearly a four-fold increase.



German Agriculture Ministry Regierungsdirektor Dr. Hans-Jürgen Froese in center, flanked by his Ag Ministry colleagues Christian Virks and Janet Leisker, briefing visiting American ag reporters. Photo: *Agri-Pulse*.

Agri-Pulse is one of the publications taking part in an intensive week-long program of visits with German government agencies, renewable energy research organizations, and private companies. The “From Agro Farming to Energy Farming, the Role of Green Energy in German Agriculture” is part of the Transatlantic Climate Bridge program which Germany’s Foreign Office launched in 2008 to facilitate U.S./Canadian/German cooperation on green energy development to “create new jobs and world-class industries, clean up the environment and protect the climate, improve standards of living and enhance global security.”