

We take a look back at the highlights from the International Biogas Congress & Expo, which took place in Brussels in October, featuring words from WBA and Ørsted

The fight to realise biogas' potential in achieving net zero

by Dawn Stephens-Borg

On 22-23 October, *Bioenergy Insight* held its annual conference, incorporating three key events: the Biogas Congress & Expo, Biomass Congress & Expo and Biofuels International Conference & Expo. A fantastic line-up of key speakers and more than 200 delegates from all over the world gathered at the grand Hotel Le Plaza in Brussels to discuss the latest trends in bioenergy and biofuels.

I had the pleasure of attending the biogas portion of the conference, which welcomed key speakers such as Andreas Guth of Eurogas, Charlotte Morton of the World Biogas Association (WBA), Damien Speight of Ørsted and Malcolm L. McDowell of DG Energy on behalf of the European Commission. From the get-go, the underlying message appeared to be: how can we ensure that we fulfil the potential of biogas for a sustainable future? Biogas, as an industry, has shown to have enormous scope to help the European Union (EU) and its members to achieve the target of net zero emissions by 2050.

Charlotte Morton's talk about the vast potential of biogas and anaerobic digestion was inspiring, and sparked a discussion amongst delegates. "The important thing to realise is that this technology [anaerobic digestion] is not just about energy; it meets and makes a significant contribution to nine of the 17 UN sustainable development calls, which must all be met by 2030 – in 10 years' time. But perhaps the biggest one of all is our contribution to reducing climate change, which I suspect even you don't realise quite how big that contribution could be," she said.

Morton admitted that until the WBA investigated the potential of biogas and AD, even they didn't realise how significant the contribution could be. "We've got about 15 million microdigesters in the world. About 132 small, medium and large size digesters, most of those are generating electricity and in some cases, heat. There are at

least 700 upgrading plants [potentially now up to 1,000] generating nearly 90 terawatt hours of energy, and employing nearly 350,000 people already. But that is just 2% of our potential. So, we are talking quite big numbers here.

"If we're at 2% of our potential and we're already employing 350,000 people, this is an industry that should be capable of employing somewhere between 12-15 million people in 10 years' time."

These impressive figures elicited multiple nods of approval from the room; however, the key figure Morton presented was that if we were able to collect all the reasonably collectable organic waste that we generate, we could reduce global emissions by 12% through biogas. This figure is "conservative", according to Morton, but still significant.

Although we've still got a long way to go to drastically reduce emissions globally, the good news is that the technology is largely already available. Many of the companies presenting at the conference expressed that the level of innovation has been exciting. It's just a matter of putting the technology to use.

Regulation was, perhaps unsurprisingly, a hot topic. All organisations in the biogas sector agree that without the help and support of regulators and policymakers, biogas can only go so far. So, what's stopping governments from taking the necessary steps to support bioenergy? According to some, it's social resistance. Wind and solar have long been seen as the cleaner, greener option, leaving bioenergy behind.

Damien Speight, head of business innovation at Ørsted, presented an optimistic view on the drive for change: "If we look at a world run entirely on green energy, there are three things that I look at – timing, tangibility and technology. When I look at the three Ts, timing is about appetite. I think we see an increasing appetite from ourselves and the next generation. You'll have seen the climate conference in New York, you'll have seen the demonstrations and the striking and the next generation is demanding this type of change.

"When we look at tangibility, well you can see it is achievable. There is an appetite, and there are companies like Ørsted that are making this pay. If you can make technology in a transition pay, in other words shareholder value, then it mobilises, and it mobilises very quickly."

Ørsted is in itself an example of the drive to switch to green energy. Speight noted the company's former name – Danish Oil and Natural Gas. "We were big oil, and we've made a transition to moving towards a purely renewable company. We'll be coal-free by 2023."

In every topic covered at the conference, from financing biogas projects to analysing the latest trends in Europe and exploring the newest technologies, the motivation was clear: fight for biogas' place in the drive towards net zero.

Are you interested in speaking at next year's biogas or biomass conference, or sponsoring the event? Get in touch today to register your interest: marketing@woodcotemedia.com ●

