

Biofuels and community participation: Engaging process in the emerging bioeconomy

Checklist for Community Participation:

The following are suggestions from University of Wisconsin Extension educators and University of Wisconsin researchers on ways to assure that community members are involved in decision-making about the development of bioenergy facilities.

- 1) Community discussion about bioenergy opportunities should happen before any development takes place.
 - o Information sessions: what is bioenergy, what are energy issues for this community? How can bioenergy fit with economic development in the community?
 - o Opportunities for community debate and discussion:
 - What are the perceived issues?
 - What would the impact be on the community (social, economic, environmental)?
 - Does it fit with community goals and plans?

- 2) Information about proposals (for specific developments) should be communicated using an open and transparent process:
 - o There should be an active effort to engage the community
 - o Post notices about meetings in advance of meeting
 - o Meetings where both sides (if there are sides) have opportunity to present their information (through informational booths, etc.) are important ways to communicate information and show that various opinions are taken seriously
 - o The town board or other 'public' entity should organize input/information meetings and should facilitate the discussions
 - o Public meetings of the developer don't count for active engagement; this is the industry proposal but will not be comprehensive in answering community questions
 - o County level hearings are for permitting, and that's too late in the process for getting effective public participation
 - o Conflict of interest (real or perceived) must be dealt with openly
 - Individuals should excuse themselves if there is a conflict of interest (for example, if a supervisor is an investor in a facility or if a family member will get a construction contract or a job with the plant)

- 3) Zoning Review
 - o Does the town have a plan?

- o Zoning is a pre-requisite for an open process to happen; stick to zoning decisions
- o What is the rezoning process, if this is necessary?

4) At meetings

- o Well-organized public comment process/protocol, that people recognize and understand
- o Be systematic and organized
- o Make sure that there is a formal way to take comment, and that this is stuck to
- o Have comment cards for those who do not want to make oral comments at meeting
- o Develop a process to look at social and environmental impacts systematically.

5) Professionalism

- o Board members should conduct business and interactions with professional demeanor
- o Opposition comments or organizations should be listened to and taken seriously

6) Negotiations

- o Provide means to assure community about points of concern (e.g., Well-water assurance program)
- o Community Benefits Agreements