

## EU must transform economic model to embrace bioeconomy

Written by Lambert van Nistelrooij on 11 February 2016 in Opinion  
Opinion

Europe's economies - and consumers - need to change to enjoy the benefits of bio-based developments, argues Lambert van Nistelrooij.



The time for relaxing is over. Europe's current economic model needs to change and embrace the bio-economy.

This is one of the new economic models that creates sustainable growth and at the same time safeguards the environment. This 'new' green way of generating money in Europe is all about efficiently using natural resources and biomass for multiple purposes.

It encompasses the production of renewable biological resources and their conversion into bio-based products and bioenergy. The bio-economy therefore holds great promise. This offers the potential to create jobs while making EU sectors more sustainable and competitive.

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The bio-economy will also help to achieve the European Commission's goals for the circular economy strategy. However, to make this a reality for both consumers and producers, we need ideal growing conditions.

Currently, all member states apply different rules on using biomaterials, meaning no internal market. To grow our bio-economy, the key will be design thinking, export thinking and financial thinking; it's time to act. This is why I published a briefing paper for the Dutch presidency entitled: Towards ideal growing conditions for the bio-economy.

Unlike recycling and sustainability, consumers and manufacturers are not instantly familiar with bio-economy benefits. If we are to realise the advantages, we need an EU-wide campaign to raise awareness of them. Only by knowing what the bio-economy is can you understand what you are buying.

We need to increase recognition of biomaterials and bio-based products in Europe. There only will be an internal market if we all work in unison.

For producers already active in the bio-economy or those who wish to enter the sector, it is also all about knowing where they should be going.

They need to be aware of existing funding possibilities as well as how and where to apply. Despite the EU's current risk-averse financing climate, the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI) has offered SMEs and start-ups within innovative and sustainable sectors the opportunity to request funding since September 2015. This way, EFSI is contributing to the development of the bio-economy.

It is important to realise that it will take cooperation and communication to turn these recommendations into ideal conditions for the bio-economy.

There needs to be cooperation on an EU level to strengthen the internal market and to develop a coherent framework of legislation for the use of biomaterials and bio-based products.

There also needs to be strong communication between national and regional stakeholders. We need stronger relationships based on the 'triple helix' approach of industry, academia and government working together.

In the Netherlands, the bio-based Delta is a good example of such cooperation. This is a 'champion region', because it uses the 'smart specialisation' approach.

The golden rule is to focus on what you are good at and work together with other regions in areas where they succeed. In the bio-based Delta, regions, entrepreneurs and research institutions work together to convert green resources into sustainable products and energy.

The Dutch presidency will use this region as the showcase for what the bio-economy can achieve.

## About the author

Lambert van Nistelrooij (EPP, NL) is a member of Parliament's regional development committee

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[Environment](#) [6]

[Regions](#) [7]

## Categories

[Energy](#) [8]

[Environment](#) [9]



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