



**Event Covered:** The Roundtable for Sustainable Biomaterials 2nd Annual Meeting of the General Assembly held in São Paulo, Brazil September 23, 2014



# The Standards Reporter

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## Enabling a Sustainable Bioeconomy

Many analysts consider the bioeconomy a means to transition to an economy where renewable biological materials provide the resources for developing and supplying products for human well-being. As limited global resources are further pressured by increasing populations and consumption patterns, the bioeconomy offers a potential way to address projected shortfalls.<sup>1</sup>

Numerous efforts are under way to realize the bioeconomic promise. For instance, the production of biofuels doubled from 2005 and 2012 and is still expected to expand significantly.<sup>2</sup> The World Economic Forum<sup>3</sup> reports that the revenue potential for processing biomaterials alone (excluding the value of end products such as fuels, energy and chemicals) will reach approximately US\$300 billion by 2020.

Nevertheless, growing, harvesting and converting biomass into biomaterials (e.g., biofuels, bioplastics and biopharmaceuticals) will need to be undertaken sustainably to avoid unintended consequences. For instance, concerns over land-use change, food security, greenhouse gas emissions and rural development are but a few examples of challenges that need to be overcome to enable a truly sustainable bioeconomy.

Voluntary sustainability standards have emerged as a means for managing sustainable practices in the production and

delivery of various goods and services. Through a combination of predefined sustainability criteria and corresponding conformity assessment systems, voluntary sustainability standards can provide a mechanism for avoiding unintended consequences of production and therefore have a potentially important role to play in the biomaterials sector.

Originally set up in 2007, the Roundtable for Sustainable Biomaterials (RSB) represents one of the leading standards operating in the biomaterials sector. Having recently expanded its scope from biofuels to biomaterials, the RSB provides a global standard for the sustainable production and conversion of biomass<sup>4</sup> and a flexible certification scheme for the entire biomaterials supply chain from biomass to end product. The RSB also serves as a global platform for multistakeholder dialogue and consensus building in the biomaterials sector.

This report documents the latest developments within the RSB by covering its most recent annual meeting of the General Assembly. Its certification of aviation biofuel and adoption of a certification scheme for smallholder farmers positions the RSB to continue moving the biomaterials sector toward sustainability. As the bioeconomy is poised to expand significantly, voluntary sustainability initiatives such as the RSB will play an increasingly important role in shaping the biomaterial sector's sustainable development potential.

<sup>1</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2009). *The bioeconomy to 2030: Designing a policy agenda: Main findings and policy conclusions*. Paris, France: Author.

<sup>2</sup> Potts, J. et al. (2014). *State of sustainability initiatives review 2014: Standards and the green economy*. Winnipeg, Canada: International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD).

<sup>3</sup> King, D. (2010). *The future of industrial biorefineries*. Geneva, Switzerland: World Economic Forum.

<sup>4</sup> As one of the only initiatives operating at a global scale solely dedicated to the certification of biomaterials, the RSB standard addresses the social, environmental and economic dimensions of sustainable development as it pertains to the production of biomaterials from biomass to end product.





Fifteen delegates and thirteen observers attended the meeting in person and by teleconference.

## RSB Annual Meeting of the General Assembly

The second RSB General Assembly was held in São Paulo on September 23, 2014. As the first RSB assembly outside of Europe, this meeting marked a milestone in developing and growing the RSB's member base and relevance within the sustainable biomaterials space.

### Official Session Summary

The official session of the Assembly took place in the morning as a closed session for RSB members only. The delegates took stock of various developments, reviewed finances and voted on key changes to the standard. The RSB's revenues as well as its number of certified operators increased substantially from 2013 to 2014. The Assembly adopted a smallholder standard, a theory of change and a revised version of the chain of custody standards.

### Administrative Developments

Barbara Bramble, Chair of the Board of Directors and the General Assembly, highlighted the RSB's progress since it became an independent organization in January 2013. She noted that the 2013 annual meeting of the General Assembly led to major developments within the RSB such as electing a Board of Directors and expanding its scope to include all biomaterials. Treasurer Maarten van Dijk reported that the organization's finances are on a stable footing with increased revenue from donors, as well as income from membership and licencing fees. Executive Director Rolf Hogan noted the increase in certified operators from 3 in 2012 to 17 in 2014 (representing an increase from 9,903 hectares to 56,331 hectares covered and 170,983 metric tons to 456,897 metric tons of feedstock processed). He also highlighted the RSB's progress in marketing, the aviation sector and the smallholder program in Southeast Asia, Brazil, South Africa and Mexico, supported by the Boeing Corporate Citizenship

Program,<sup>5</sup> the Swiss Government and South African Airways.

The General Assembly adopted the RSB's 2013 financial and activity reports and changes to the Articles of Association, with provisions for the Board to nominate additional directors for election by the General Assembly of Delegates. Salvador Feranil from the Philippine Network of Rural Development Institutes, Inc. (PhilNet-RDI), nominated by Chamber 5 representing rural development NGOs, was elected to the Board of Directors. The Secretariat presented its work plan and discussed the development of a long-term strategy. The Assembly asked the Board to move forward on strategy development in consultation with membership. A draft strategy will be made available for consultation during the Annual General Assembly in June 2015 and will be adopted by the RSB Board of Directors in July 2015. Membership modalities such as fees and timeline were reviewed to discuss how to increase value. The Secretariat will consult with members in the coming months to develop a forward-looking strategy.

### Standard Developments

One of the most anticipated outcomes of the meeting was the approval of the RSB smallholder standard to provide small producers with flexibility in the compliance process through a stepwise approach. The smallholder standard became part of the RSB's Smallholder Program launched in 2013, which seeks to improve the livelihoods of small farmers by linking them to markets and promoting sustainable practices based on the RSB standard.

The delegates endorsed the RSB [theory of change](#), the first step toward developing an effective [monitoring and evaluation](#) system requiring impact indicators and a data collection process. Establishing a monitoring and evaluation system is of great importance for the RSB, as it is a requirement to remain an [ISEAL Alliance](#) member. ISEAL Alliance membership demonstrates a commitment

<sup>5</sup> The Boeing Corporate Citizenship Program earmarked US\$350,000 for the RSB smallholder initiative.



Panelists participating in the public session

to transparency, multistakeholder approaches and best practices. The monitoring and evaluation system was tested in autumn 2014 and will undergo an external evaluation in winter 2015.

Sébastien Haye, Director of Standards Development, presented the revised [chain of custody standard](#), which dictates how certified material is handled and tracked down the supply chain. Accounting and documentation requirements were improved and clarified. The RSB offers several chain of custody models to fit the various traceability needs of companies. The revised version was unanimously approved by the Assembly of Delegates. Ongoing efforts to streamline the RSB standard and make it less cumbersome and more user-friendly for certification has led to simplifying ten standards and procedures and merging several documents, resulting in the reduction of RSB standards and procedures by more than one-third.

## Public Session Summary

A public session was held in the afternoon of the RSB General Assembly and featured primarily presentations and discussions on smallholders and the uptake of sustainable biofuels in the airline industry. Participants from industry, civil society and public institutions exchanged their thoughts on the challenges and opportunities that the biomaterials industry represents for smallholders as well as the pioneering role that the aviation industry is playing in consuming sustainable biofuels to move people around the world. The RSB's important contributions to creating a market for the aviation industry and enabling access for smallholders was also a significant part of the discussions.

### Smallholder Farmers

Although providing access to sustainable biomaterial markets represents a significant opportunity for smallholders, there are important barriers to overcome. Roberto Smeraldi (Amigos da Terra-Brasil) affirmed that the biomaterials

sector represents an important opportunity for smallholders by stating, "Of all the multistakeholder initiatives in which I am involved, this is the one that is using 10% to 15% of its potential—there is a huge potential in biomaterials in Brazil, and I think certification will play a critical role." The participants highlighted land tenure as well as certification costs as significant challenges for smallholders.

André Machado (coordinator, Brazilian Biofuels Program [DEGRAV], Secretary of Family Farming, Ministry of Agrarian Production Development) shared that the main challenges of the 83,000 Brazilian farming families participating in a government-sponsored biodiesel program include sound policies for promoting raw material for biomaterial supply chains (e.g., biofuels, biochemicals and foodstuffs) and clear agricultural zoning. He further explained that family agriculture is extremely diverse in Brazil, with various types of contracts used for land concessions.

Pedro Burniet (Amigos da Terra) and Helena Gonçalves (Ecosistemas) asked how the RSB was aiming to address the land tenure challenge. Aurea Nardelli (RSB) explained that although ownership is not necessarily a criterion of certification, it is something that has to be better addressed in the certification scheme. Furthermore, Rolf Hogan (RSB) expects that RSB criteria may be modified based on feedback and learning from current pilot projects in South Africa and Brazil undertaken by the RSB, South African Airways, Solaris, Boeing, SkyNRG and Sunchem. The RSB is also looking into the potential of smallholder projects involving coconut oil in Mozambique and wood pellets from coppice in Sri Lanka. The pilot projects will use joint certification with other credible standards (FSC, SAN and Bonsucro) where relevant and put a strong focus on efforts to develop markets for smallholders.

Jamil Macedo (Cooperative Program of Research, Development and Agriculture for Tropical South-Americas of the Inter-American Institute of Cooperation for Agriculture) pointed out that certification costs make it unrealistic for





Audience Members Attending the Public Session

smallholders to become certified. Rolf Hogan (RSB) agreed and explained that the RSB is working on reducing costs by engaging development agencies and donors like the Swiss government and Boeing Corporate Citizenship Program, which are covering the current costs of certification. RSB hopes to engage more government, industry and philanthropic support as part of the program. Barbara Bramble (RSB) added that certification has been designed for cooperatives and most can afford it, but cooperative managers need to be trained to complete the necessary forms on behalf of farmers.

### Aviation Industry

Some aviation companies are moving aggressively to meet their fuel requirements via sustainable biofuels, creating opportunities for the biofuels sector and the RSB. Pedro Scorza (GOL Airlines) conveyed GOL Airlines' commitment to biofuels by describing the successes and challenges associated with incorporating sustainable biofuels over the past four years. Kelly Seligman (Amyris) shared with the audience that 30 million kilometres have been travelled with Amyris biodiesel blends, including a demonstration flight with GOL Airlines in 2014, the first international commercial flight

using Amyris-Total jet fuel. She also shared the company's experience implementing the RSB standard, which took approximately one year and included several internal pre-assessments. Amyris is working with its feedstock suppliers to expand the scope of RSB certification and expects its local production plants to provide certified feedstock within the year.

A number of questions were raised during the discussion. Jose Miguel (TAM Airlines) asked if a worldwide standard exists for biofuels. Barbara Bramble (RSB) explained that biofuel standards are usually either technical or environmental but that a harmonized system is needed to achieve legal minimums. She further clarified that RSB is a global certification standard that covers technical, environmental, as well as social aspects. RSB delegate James G.M. Onchieku (Kenya Forestry Research Institute) questioned whether food security and biofuel crop production were competing issues in Brazil. Andre Machado affirmed that while Brazil has an abundance of primary materials for biodiesel production destined for domestic and export markets, the government is concerned with food security and has incentives for planting food crops in underused areas.

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**Photo credits:** Leslie Pass

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