£4 million funding to boost UK biomass production

- 24 projects will receive government funding of up to £200,000 to increase UK production of biomass that can be used as sources of green energy
- projects include growing algae from whisky manufacturing, increasing yields of grass varieties and accelerating the breeding of willow trees
- biomass is used for low-carbon renewable energy generation and is a key component in UK's commitment to tackle climate change

Farming seaweed and growing algae from the by-products of whisky manufacturing are among 24 projects today (Wednesday, 25 August) awarded £4 million government funding to boost biomass production.

The 24 innovative projects, from start-ups and family-run businesses to research institutes and universities, will receive funding of up to £200,000 from the government's Biomass Feedstocks Innovation Programme to produce low-carbon energy using organic materials.

The projects will boost biomass productivity in the UK, through breeding, planting, cultivating and harvesting of organic energy materials.

Biomass refers to sustainably derived plant material that could be used as fuel to produce energy or to create products such as chemicals and bio-plastics. It is a small but important part of the renewable energy mix that the UK requires to meet its commitment to eradicate its contribution to climate change by 2050 – and is also backed by the UK's independent Committee on Climate Change.

Biomass materials include non-food energy crops such as grasses and hemp, material from forestry operations and marine-based materials such as algae and seaweed.

Energy Minister Lord Callanan said:

> Working to develop new and greener types of fuel like biomass is an important part of building a the diverse and green energy mix that we will need to achieve our climate change targets.
>
> We are backing UK innovators to ensure we have a homegrown supply of biomass materials, which is part of our wider plans to continue driving down carbon emissions as we build back greener.

Funding recipients

Today's funding recipients include:

- Rickerby Estates Ltd in Carlisle has received over £150,000, to look at scaling-up the harvesting of willow crops using new cutting-edge technology such as automated processing machinery that is controlled by GPS satellite guidance systems
- Green Fuels Research Limited in Gloucestershire has received over £190,000 for a project that will allow microscopic algae to be produced for biomass using wastewater from breweries and dairy industries
- SeaGrown Limited in Scarborough will use over £180,000 funding to develop new techniques to farm and harvest seaweed off the North Yorkshire coast, taking advantage of seaweed's qualities as a source of biomass and its ability to remove carbon from the atmosphere
- Impact Laboratories Limited in Stirlingshire, Scotland, received over £170,000 to look at innovation in the commercial cultivation of algae utilising heat provided by geothermally-warmed water from abandoned mine sites
- Aberystwyth University, Wales, has received over £160,000 for their 'Miscanspeed' project, which is looking at ways to improve the breeding of high-yielding, resilient Miscanthus or elephant grass – grass varieties that are well-suited for biomass use – in the UK

As a result of the £4 million government funding, the Biomass Feedstocks Innovation Programme will enable greater supply of organic materials from domestic sources rather than using imported matter, with the 24 projects supporting rural economies across the UK, including providing jobs and encouraging investment.

The Biomass Feedstocks Innovation Programme is funded through the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy's £1 billion Net Zero Innovation Portfolio. This supports the Prime Minister's 10 Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution that sets out the approach government will take to build back better, support green jobs, and accelerate our path to net zero.

UK Net Zero Business Champion Andrew Griffith said:

> Innovation is crucial to achieve a low carbon future and it's fantastic that the UK is home to so much world-leading entrepreneurial talent that will help us meet our climate change commitments.
>
> Not only will this funding for biomass feedstocks help to achieve net zero by 2050, but it rightly rewards innovative people and businesses that are leading the way to a brighter, cleaner future.

The UK government intends to publish a new biomass strategy in 2022 which will review the amount of sustainable biomass available to the UK and how this could be best utilised across the economy to help achieve the government's net zero and wider environmental commitments.

Dr Matthew Brown, co-founder of Forest Creation Partners, said:

> This government funding will enable us to find more places to plant trees up and down the country, fighting climate change and supporting local nature and communities.
>
> We're proud to be part of Britain's global leadership in using data science to create a greener and better world.

Dr Sebastien Jubeau and Dr Douglas McKenzie founders of Phycofoods, trading as Phyco-F, said:

> At Phyco-F we are delighted to have been awarded a contract to evaluate the feasibility of producing microalgae at significant industrial quantities using CO2 and nutrients produced as by-products of whisky production.
>
> If this evaluation is promising we will work with our partners in the whisky industry to develop a plan for the UK's first demonstration plant that will be operating before the end of 2023.

In November 2020, the government launched the brand Together For Our Planet which provides practical tools, resources and advice to support companies to take action on climate change, understand their emissions and develop a plan to tackle them.

Notes for editors

- the Biomass Feedstocks Innovation Programme is funded through the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy's £1 billion Net Zero Innovation Portfolio, which aims to accelerate the commercialisation of innovative clean energy technologies and processes through the 2020s and 2030s
- this competition is being conducted in 2 phases, one building on the other, to produce innovations that address some of the barriers to feedstock production, helping to scale up the supply of UK sustainable biomass in the coming years
- in Phase 1, suppliers will receive full funding to produce robust project plans for innovations that, if implemented, would make a positive material contribution to UK feedstock supply
- in Phase 2, Phase 1 projects that successfully progress will enact their project plans, successfully constructing, operating, testing, refining and evaluating the innovations and having a clear commercialisation route for deployment

Read a full list of successful projects.