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### **EU promises new biofuel rules won't harm the environment**

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BRUSSELS, Belgium (AP) - The European Union promised Monday that its new push to promote biofuels will try to prevent harming the environment or adding to greenhouse gas levels as the rush toward the cash crop worries environmentalists. Europe and the United States are planning to use more transport fuel made from crops, such as

corn, rapeseed or sugar cane, to replace polluting oil \_ aiming also to cut down on expensive energy imports.

But the biofuel boom has alarmed many experts and campaigners, who warn of a host of unintended

consequences from a massive shift to biofuel production that could see virgin forests cleared and food prices rise if poor farmers plant fuel crops instead of food.

The environmental and social problems caused by biofuels «are bigger than we thought they

were,» EU Environment Commissioner Stavros Dimas told the British Broadcasting Corp. in an interview Monday.

But the EU's head office will stick to a goal set by the bloc's leaders last year to replace 10 percent of finite transport fuel by 2020 with fuel made from renewable sources, EU spokesman Ferran Tarradellas Espuny said.

He said the detailed rules on how Europe will ramp up its own biofuel production and what kind of fuel it will import from elsewhere will include «very strict environmental criteria» when they are published Jan. 23.

«We are going to do that in a way that is going to cause no damage or at least less damage (than would) be caused if we continued to use fossil fuels,» he told reporters.

«The biofuels we are going to use here are going to have a net balance of CO2 emissions meaning that we are going to save a substantial amount of CO2,» he said.

There are worries that producing and burning some biofuels can use up energy and release more carbon dioxide than is saved by switching away from the fossil fuels blamed for global warming.

Tarradellas Espuny promised that the EU would also take care to ensure biofuels would not lead to farmers clearing rain forests, which absorb huge amounts of CO2. But he would not say how the EU will make sure that its fuel does not trigger more problems than it solves, saying no final decisions would be made until next week.

He also refused to answer questions on whether the EU would try to make sure a swing to biofuel farming would not push up food prices or act to uphold protect land rights and labor standards that could be trampled in a land grab to grow the latest cash crop.

Grain prices rose sharply last year as Europe and the United States called for more biofuel output \_ leading to higher prices for bread and tortillas in poorer nations.

A U.N. report warned that high commodity prices could last throughout the decade as more maize, wheat, rapeseed and sugar is turned into fuel.

Jean Ziegler, the U.N.'s independent expert on the right to food, called for a five-year moratorium on biofuels to stop what he called a growing «catastrophe» for the poor.

Green campaigners Friends of the Earth Europe on Monday called for the EU to step away from its 10 percent biofuel target unless it could put safeguards in place, saying biofuels would be a disaster for the environment and would hurt the world's poor.

«Using crops to produce fuel is a false solution to climate change \_ the real solutions lie

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