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Extracting value from non-potable water using halophilic algae: A water-food-energy nexus approach for delivering bioenergy

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Statement of the Problem: The global energy consumption will grow up to 50% by 2035; 60% more food will be needed for survival and global water use for irrigation could increase by 10% by 2050. Glycerol, a new biofuel and by-product of biodiesel manufacturing, is planned to be combusted using new engine technology (410kW electrical; 450kW thermal) to provide heat and power, at the University of Greenwich UK, provided sufficient reliable supplies of glycerol can be sourced at the right specification. Biofuels however, can necessitate substantial water inputs depending on feedstock production; by 2030, the global blue biofuel water footprint might have grown to 5.5% of the totally available blue water for humans causing extra pressure on fresh water resources.

Methodology & Theoretical Orientation: The blue water footprint of the net energy provided by microalgal biofuels has been concluded to be significantly smaller compared with fuels from other energy crops. Extremophile, halotolerant microalgae such as *Dunaliella* produce glycerol without the requirement to process lipids to release the glycerol. The potential for commercial glycerol production from *Dunaliella* is examined in the D-Factory, a €10m, 14-partner, FP7-funded project (2013-2017).

Findings: *Dunaliella* can be cultivated at large-scale in hypersaline water using solar energy and with minimal fresh water and flue-gas CO_2. These algae can be processed for glycerol and a range of high-value products for disease mitigation, and biomass can be used in new food products and in feedstuffs. A demonstration is underway to show the potential for commercialization of algae such as *Dunaliella*. From this work, the scope to produce commodities such as glycerol from algae is discussed in the context of the water-food-energy nexus and circular economy.

Conclusion & Significance: Awareness of the water-food-energy nexus offers opportunities to utilize algae sustainably for the production of bio-based products.

Biography

Patricia J Harvey is a Senior Expert in bioenergy value chains and the water-food-energy nexus, with particular focus on the use of algal and non-food plant systems for the capture of CO_2, use of non-potable water and production of green chemicals and biofuels. She is the Coordinator of "The CO_2 microalgae biorefinery: D-Factory", a 10 million Euro FP7-Funded Project; "Macrobiocrude", (EPSRC-funded); "Non-food bio oil supply chains" (EU-ACP-funded) aimed at capacity building measures in South Africa, Namibia and Ghana to create sustainable, non-food supply chains; Ecotec21 (EU-Interreg) which installed novel, biofuel-fired CHP technology at the University of Greenwich using bio oils and glycerol; Tuning algae for biofuel profitably (NERC, Innovate UK).

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