

## Interview

# Martin Behrens

Senior Advisor Department EU and International  
Cooperation at Fachagentur Nachhaltige  
Rohstoffe (FNR)



Martin Behrens, Fachagentur  
Nachwachsende Rohstoffe (FNR)

**The FNR is an agency that promotes the use of bio-based raw materials in various areas, e.g. in sustainable construction. Why is the switch to biomass as feedstock so important?**

While significant progress has been made in replacing fossil energy with renewable sources, our economy remains heavily reliant on fossil-based resources for many everyday materials and prod-

ucts. The bioeconomy and bio-based products present a sustainable alternative to reduce dependence on fossil fuels for daily-use materials. Nearly all fossil-based materials have bio-based

counterparts. The construction sector, one of the fastest-growing industries globally, will face immense challenges in meeting the demand for housing due to the projected global population increase to 9.7 billion by 2050. At the same time, the sector is a major source of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, as materials like cement, bricks, and steel require

substantial energy, most of which is currently derived from fossil fuels. Transitioning to greener practices in construction can play a crucial role in reducing global carbon emissions. The adoption of timber and bio-based materials in building projects can significantly lower emissions and even contribute to long-term carbon sequestration.

### **Biomass has established itself as a valuable carbon-source for many products. Which application areas beyond building materials seem promising for the long-term replacement of fossil-derived materials by renewable biomass?**

An important sector where a significant amount of petroleum-based materials is used today is the textile industry. Combined with the trend of using clothing for shorter periods, this leads to significant climate consequences, as so-called fast fashion is often not recyclable and is frequently burned. The return to nature-based materials in clothing production, as they have been used by humanity since the beginning of time, is an important contribution to combating climate change

and promoting a more sustainable approach to textiles. Nonetheless the advantage of using bio-based products in the building sector is the medium or long-term carbon storage capacity. Therefore, we need to prolong the use phases for fashion products, ensure that they can be reused and finally recycled. Fast fashion is a dead-end in terms of sustainability, regardless of the material base used.

### **What role does certification play in sustainable construction?**

Most consumers are not experts in the material properties of construction products and their sustainable production. At the same time, there is a growing interest in using environmentally friendly products in construction. Product-specific

and holistic certification systems can play a key role in informing builders about sustainable products or entire building systems, thereby facilitating their decision to choose more sustainable and climate-friendly options.

### **Can you give some examples of construction materials for which bio-based solutions already exist?**

Alternative products are available for almost every part of a building. As with any application, it is crucial to assess carefully the intended use and the

necessary material properties. In this regard, bio-based products are no different from their fossil-based counterparts.

**What role do consumers play in the uptake of bio-based solutions? How can consumers be persuaded to choose a sustainable, bio-based option, even if it is more expensive in some cases (green premium)? Where do you see key-challenges in persuading consumers?**

Consumers play a key-role in adopting bio-based solutions, influencing market demand and encouraging manufacturers to be more sustainable. To persuade consumers to choose bio-based options despite a "green premium," it is crucial to educate them on the long-term environmental benefits and provide clear labelling with sustainability certifications. Highlighting the tangible impact, like reduced CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, can

also motivate sustainable choices. Financial incentives or subsidies could help reduce the price gap. However, challenges such as price sensitivity, scepticism about performance, and a lack of awareness about the benefits of bio-based products remain. Overcoming these barriers through education and consistent messaging is essential for increasing consumer adoption.