



Biofuels from Algae: Chapter 14. Economics of Microalgae Biomass Production

F.G. Acién, J.M. Fernández, E. Molina-Grima

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Microalgae have been proposed as the potential source for a wide range of products, ranging from fine chemicals and pharmaceuticals to foods and feeds and as a biofuel source. However, only a few are successful on an industrial scale due to the high cost associated with the production of microalgae biomass. This chapter presents an economic analysis of various processes based on microalgae: from high-value products like astaxanthin to low-value products like biofuels. The target is to identify major factors contributing to production costs as a tool for the improvement of existing processes but also to assist in the design of new, more reliable processes. The results of our analysis demonstrate that for the production of high-value compounds, high-energy-demanding processes can be carried out, including with low productivity, whereas for the production of low-value compounds it is mandatory to minimize power consumption and improve productivity. More precisely, biomass productivity is the major factor impacting the unit production cost, whatever the product; therefore, to optimize the productivity of microalgae production systems, it is mandatory to improve the economic viability of microalgae-based processes.

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