

Manifesto for biostimulants

This policy manifesto serves as a blueprint for EU policymakers, stakeholders, and the broader community, highlighting the urgent need for transformative action in the agricultural sector during the next EU Parliamentary mandate and Commission Work Programme for 2024-2029.

It aims to address the pressing challenges facing modern agriculture, including farmer livelihoods, climate change mitigation, soil degradation, and food security. By advocating for and incentivising concrete innovative solutions, such as the use of plant biostimulants, EBIC aims to empower European farmers, promote sustainable practices, and ensure a resilient and prosperous agricultural future for generations to come.

Through collaborative efforts and strategic policymaking, we believe that sustainable and resilient food systems can become a reality in the EU.



Towards sustainable food systems: A call for EU policy to empower farmers with biostimulant solutions.

The European Biostimulants Industry Council (EBIC) represents 70 manufacturers of plant biostimulants in Europe. Its mission is to ensure biostimulant technologies are valued as integral to sustainable agriculture, while securing an enabling regulatory framework for all of them.

According to recent data, the global biostimulants market is expected to almost triple in the coming years (from 3.2 billion dollars in 2023 to more than 9.0 billion dollars in 2030) with Europe accounting for around one-third of that market share.

Plant biostimulants belong to the family of fertilising products. As demonstrated by a wealth of scientific evidence, they stimulate natural plant processes to improve nutrient use efficiency. They also improve crop quality and tolerance to abiotic stress, such as difficult climate conditions or lack of

water. Biostimulants are therefore well-placed to support European farmers in their transition towards a more sustainable food system, while enhancing agricultural competitiveness, food security and resilience in the context of increasingly volatile climate events.

At a time when farmers require access to the right tools more than ever to transition to sustainable agriculture in Europe, the EU regulatory and policy landscape must foster innovation. It must also enable the use of new technologies to help adapt to and mitigate climate change, while simultaneously guaranteeing food security. This can be achieved through farmer-focused incentives and significantly improved access to market for sustainable technologies, such as plant biostimulants, both now and in the future.

Empowering farmer choice

Accessing an array of innovative tools for sustainable food systems

Farmers need access to a broad toolbox and the freedom to select options tailored to their crops, soils, climatic conditions, customer preferences, and other factors influencing their operations. Farmers are best placed to determine how to adapt their farming practices if they are given the right enabling framework.

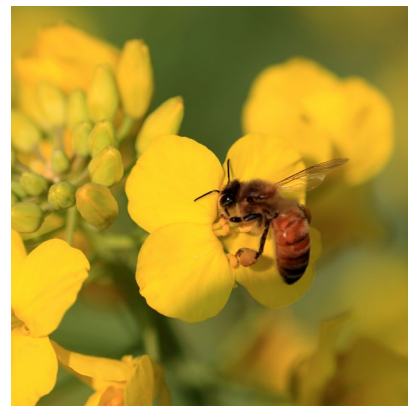
We must invest in, and leverage, the EU's agrifood ecosystem to the benefit of farmer livelihoods and the competitiveness of the EU market. **Agricultural inputs are more than the sum of their parts when used as part of an integrated plant nutrient management approach.**



The EU must get better at ensuring agrifood innovations reach farmers. A politically supportive Union for innovation is imperative for fostering a resilient agricultural sector in the European agrifood industry. Currently, many innovative and highly effective plant biostimulant technologies lack access to the Single Market (e.g. microbial biostimulants). This creates an uneven playing field for farmers across Member States, with hundreds of crop solutions stuck in regulatory pipelines rather than being available to farmers. At the same time, in some other regions of the world (e.g. LATAM), farmers do have access to these innovative solutions, increasing the competitiveness gap between EU farmers and the rest of the world.

Alongside farmers' best agricultural practices, plant biostimulants are part of the solution to achieve a more sustainable agri-chain. They are a crucial tool in farmers' toolboxes, alongside fertilisers, plant protection products, precision technologies and digital resources. For a competitive sustainability transition, farmers must maximise the benefit of all their applied inputs. Fluctuating and elevated prices for inputs like fertilisers have created additional incentives for farmers to optimise the efficiency of input use, including with the use of plant biostimulants. However, their uptake should be incentivised through EU policy tools to empower farmers to make the right choices for their specific situations.

EU farm policy should also ensure adequate training, advice, and incentives for farmers to learn about and adopt sustainable, site-specific practices to improve all aspects (environmental, economic and social) of the sustainability of their operations, such as integrated plant nutrition and soil fertility management, within conventional, organic and regenerative farming.



2

Climate-resilient agriculture

Harnessing new technologies through EU policy

Climate change is increasing the frequency and severity of extreme weather events. This climate volatility threatens global food security by raising the abiotic stress pressure on every crop.

Plant biostimulants help reduce crop losses and increase and optimise yields by making crops more resilient to abiotic stresses, including – but not limited to – climate shocks, such as floods, drought, and extreme temperatures:

- Several biostimulants enhance root development and activity, improving plants' access to water even in drought conditions;
- Plants become more tolerant to temperature stress thanks to the application of biostimulants and can better survive heatwaves or frost events and start growth again more quickly when temperatures return to normal;
- Protecting against abiotic stresses also reduces the chances of plants falling prey to opportunistic pests or diseases, challenges which scientists expect to increase with climate change;
- Plant biostimulants can improve quality traits of fruits and vegetables, thereby reducing damage in storage, processing and distribution; enhance qualitative criteria (e.g. protein or sugar content or colouration); achieve longer shelf life and therefore fewer food losses and less food waste.

The use of plant biostimulants also has a positive impact on soil fertility and biodiversity, as well as enhancing all aspects of soil health. Soil health is measured in terms of physical (texture, structure, stability), chemical (nutrient availability, cation exchange capacity, pH), and biological (organic matter, micro-organisms) parameters;

- Plant biostimulants encourage better root systems. Roots contribute to soil health by improving aeration and drainage, preventing erosion, adding organic matter, and producing root exudates which support beneficial soil microbes. Greater root biomass leads to more soil carbon, which benefits soil structure, increases microbial activity and enhances nutrient supply;
- Plant biostimulants boost nutrient use efficiency, reducing nutrient losses such as leaching from the soil. Improved nutrient uptake balances nutrients and trace elements in the plant contributing to more nutritious food and maximising the production capacity of soils;
- Microbial plant biostimulants enrich the micro biodiversity of soils, improving soil fertility, health and structure to benefit plant growth and climate resilience;
- Plant biostimulants' ability to improve the climate resilience of crops will help to reduce soil erosion, desertification, and land degradation.

3

Ensuring strategic autonomy

Placing food security at the heart of the new EU agenda

Increasingly, destructive climate events threaten food security and nutrition. Plant biostimulants enhance different aspects of plant growth (yield, quality), thereby optimising the application of inputs and reducing harvest losses due to climate impacts.

Moreover, with geopolitics influencing the cost and availability of raw materials, there is an increasing need to boost the EU's strategic autonomy for the benefit of food security, farmer incomes, and increased competitiveness of EU agricultural production.

Plant biostimulants:

- Support the uptake and assimilation of nutrients from fertiliser applications, improving nutrient use efficiency. This increases food production while maximising the efficacy of other inputs and reducing the climate footprint of nutrients used;
- Help optimise crop yield and quality, such as the number of fruits, the protein content of the grain, the weight of the leaves (vegetables) and other important traits, leading to less waste along the food chain;
- Reduce nutrient losses to the environment, including nutrients in the soil, and the volatilisation of certain nitrogen gases that contribute to the greenhouse gas effect.



EBIC's EU policy asks:

- Reduced regulatory barriers
- Incentives for farmer uptake

To ensure farmers can access and benefit from the potential advantages outlined in this manifesto on a level playing field, regulatory barriers to placing plant biostimulants on the single market must be reduced and policy incentives introduced to encourage their uptake and use.

To achieve this, we recommend that EU policymakers facilitate and speed-up routes to market, many of which are currently blocked within the FPR for years, hindering EU efforts to transition to sustainable agriculture – so that the EU market, and our farmers, can remain competitive.

Additionally, EU policy must incentivise and facilitate the uptake and application of beneficial products, such as plant biostimulants, to make the transition to sustainable food systems a reality.

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About EBIC

The European Biostimulants Industry Council (EBIC) promotes the contribution of plant biostimulants to make agriculture more sustainable and resilient and in doing so promotes the growth and development of the European Biostimulants Industry.

