

“European Bioeconomy University”: Six Universities Form International Alliance with Focus on Bioeconomy

Europe’s leading universities in the field of the bioeconomy are looking to further intensify their existing cooperation to develop common problem-solving approaches for society’s most urgent challenges. Think Tank for Europe: The six leading European universities in the field of the bioeconomy are planning to join forces in research, teaching/education, and innovation in this subject area. Following the initiative of the University of Hohenheim in Stuttgart (Germany), they have laid the cornerstone for the “European Bioeconomy University” consortium - so that the European economy can become more resource-efficient, sustainable, competitive, and based on a circular mindset.

For the European Union, a knowledge-based bioeconomy plays a key role – for example in the development of new crops for food, feed and industry, of new products, as bioplastics and chemicals from renewable resources, of crops adapted to changing climates, and of energy from biomass. In 2012, the EU put forth its Bioeconomy Strategy, paving the way for a sustainable and future-oriented economy in Europe based on renewable resources. The new 2018 EU roadmap indicates a clear direction for further developments.

“European Bioeconomy University” – that is the title under which the six strongest European universities in the area of the bioeconomy will team up to work towards a common goal. The participants in this initiative are:

University of Bologna (Italy)

University of Eastern Finland (Finland)

University of Hohenheim (Germany)

AgroParisTech, Paris Institute of Technology for Life, Food and Environmental Sciences (France)

University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna (BOKU, Austria)

Wageningen University and Research (Netherlands)

Benefits of a Knowledge-Based Bioeconomy for the Environment, Economy and Society

The bioeconomy faces a range of major challenges: The rapidly growing global population makes it more difficult to ensure food security, and at the same time natural resources need to be used sustainably. The European economy is still highly dependent on fossil fuels – something that a

bioeconomy could change, while at the same time contributing to climate change mitigation.

A sustainable and knowledge-based bioeconomy would also benefit the European economy. Over 18 million jobs already exist in today's bioeconomic sector, with the potential of at least one million new green jobs by 2030. New future-oriented jobs could be created for Europe's younger generations of employees, strengthening the European Union's international competitiveness. The bioeconomy thus benefits the environment, the economy and society alike, and also promotes the transition to sustainability.

Research, Qualification, Innovation – The Keys to Success

"We are in agreement with the European Union that the bioeconomy is the future," stated Prof. Dr. Stephan Dabbert, President of the University of Hohenheim, which initiated the project. "In the past, researchers at these six universities have collaborated on numerous projects. We are looking to expand this collaboration and create a new form of cooperation so we can work more visibly and effectively on shaping the European Bioeconomy," he emphasized on behalf of the consortium.

The universities consider three pillars to be absolutely essential for the transition to a bioeconomy: They believe that research forms the basis. Secondly, education and excellence in teaching are vital to tap into the full potential of the future bioeconomy. And thirdly, innovations are key for the transformation of research findings into new technologies, services, products, and companies.

The consortium is convinced that the "European Bioeconomy University" will serve as a future think tank in the European Union. The participating partners cover all areas of the bioeconomy - from agriculture, nutrition, forestry, environment, and sustainability, through industrial applications and biotechnology, to economic and social aspects. This means that the "European Bioeconomy University" can make an important contribution to the transformation towards a knowledge-based bioeconomy in Europe and help to accelerate this process.

Background on the Participating Universities

University of Hohenheim

Bioeconomy is the leading research topic at the University of Hohenheim. At the three faculties (Agricultural Sciences, Natural Sciences, and Business, Economics and Social Sciences), agricultural, nutritional, and food scientists work hand in hand with physicists, biologists, biotechnologists, economists, and social scientists. They cover everything from plant and animal production to new technical processes and the necessary change processes in the economy and society.

The University of Hohenheim offers several Bachelor's and Master's programs in the area of the bioeconomy, including the cross-faculty Master's program Bioeconomy.

University of Bologna

Through its 32 departments the University of Bologna invests in a multidisciplinary cross-cultural approach to bioeconomy thanks to the inseparable connection between research and teaching, the promotion of international networking and young researchers' mobilization. The University of Bologna has dedicated a growing attention to the bioeconomy R&I and is currently committed in 35 H2020 projects with a total EU contribution of over 12M€.

Moreover, the University of Bologna can count also on a considerable experience in bioeconomy education among which are worth citing: the first European Master in Bioeconomy in the circular economy, Erasmus Mundus Joint doctorate in Sustainable Industrial Chemistry, Erasmus Mundus Master Course in Chemical Innovation and Regulation and an upcoming international Master in Low Carbon Technologies And Sustainable Chemistry.

University of Eastern Finland

The strategic focus of the University of Eastern Finland relating to the bioeconomy is on forests, wood and land use. The diverse expertise covers the whole value network ranging from forests and customers to all uses, functions and services of forest ecosystems. Research and education in this domain focus on product and service innovations, and on the use of novel forest- and wood-based material solutions, while also addressing their ecological and social implications. These include the sufficiency and governance of natural resources and the acceptability and responsibility of their use.

UEF has several Master's degree programmes related to the forest-based bioeconomy, including European Forestry, Wood Materials Science, and Tourism Marketing and Management programmes. The Doctoral Programme in Forests and Bioresources, too, focuses on the forest-based bioeconomy. More than half of the students in these programmes are international students.

AgroParisTech (Paris Institute of Technology for Life, Food and Environmental Sciences)

AgroParisTech encompasses the multiple dimensions of bioeconomy from agricultural production, management of land and natural resources, forestry, sustainable and healthy food systems, biotechnologies to related socio-economic sciences, implementing this vision through its research, innovation and education activities, supporting both excellence and multidisciplinary.

As the French leading graduate school in this field, AgroParisTech offers MSc in engineering, Master as well as PhD programmes and executive education covering bioeconomy topics in an integrative approach.

University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences (BOKU)

Founded in 1872, BOKU does research and teaching in managing natural resources by combining natural, technical, social and economic sciences. With this setting BOKU addresses most of the 17 SDGs defined by the United Nations covering conservation, sustainable management of agriculture, forestry and fisheries, food security, wood-processing and biotechnology. BOKU's trans- and interdisciplinary philosophy tackles the multiple challenges and is strongly application-oriented. BOKU's key vision is sustainable development by contributing to the transformation processes towards a bio-based green economy for Europe.

Wageningen University and Research

Wageningen University and Research is one of the world's leading education and research centres in the plant, animal, environmental, agro-technological, food and social sciences, and for two consecutive years the best Agriculture University worldwide. Bioeconomy is a core area for research, education and innovation at Wageningen University and Research.

WUR counts several Educational programs in this area and this year a new MSc program

Biobased Sciences has been initiated that explores the multidisciplinary and interdisciplinarity of a Circular Bioeconomy.

Press release

21-Nov-2018

Source: University of Hohenheim

Further information

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