

EU can compete at highest levels of bioeconomy

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Europe can compete at the highest levels of the bioeconomy, says Philippe Mengal.



Philippe Mengal | *Photo credit: Jean-Yves Limet*

Europe has always excelled in developing sciences and technologies, particularly in its bio-based industries. Yet compared to investment in largescale biorefineries and the deployment of bio-based production in North America, Brazil or China, Europe lags behind.

These nations have extensive biomass resources and are benefitting from R&D-investment programmes and strong political impetus for the bioeconomy. Europe has the potential to compete, but only if public and private enterprises, working across sectors, establish commercial value chains. This way Europe can be leaders in certain bio-based industries and value chains.

The BBI JU programme is designed to allow applicants to exploit possible synergies with national and

regional bioeconomy funding and financing. Regions can encourage industrial investment through coherent smart specialisation strategies that leverage structural funds.

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These large-scale and long-term private investments will attract more industry. The joint undertaking is the catalyst for the European Union and bio-based industries to align their strategies. The BBI funds research into technologies at different levels of maturity.

In some cases, it aims to bridge the gap where technologies are underdeveloped or sufficiently efficient to deploy commercially. We also support demonstration and flagship projects for mature technology where large-scale value needs to be demonstrated.

As a pan-European programme, the BBI JU is inclusive, engaging with member states and associated countries, regions and areas with strong potential for developing bio-based industries. The objective now is to widen their involvement the programme to realise the EU's full potential.

As European regions and cities increasingly see the benefits of a local bioeconomy, they will become increasingly important. The 2017 scientific priorities were set by the Bio-based Industries Consortium (BIC) and the European Commission in collaboration with BBI JU.

This followed wide consultation targeting bio-based industries, universities, Research and Technology Offices, European Technology Platforms and European industry associations as well as inputs from BBI JU's advisory bodies. These priorities place an emphasis on new functionalities and on better realising the expected impacts.

These impacts include increasing awareness, acceptance and increased societal confidence in bio-based products and industries, improving end-consumers engagement in the bioeconomy. The bio-based industry is underpinned by nature. Biomass is the best way to transform, reuse and recycle carbon dioxide.

Nevertheless, the path to 2020 demands accelerating development of new, sustainable value chains, including biomass feedstock supply, efficient processing that move towards acceptance and application of bio-based products in end-markets.

Biomass feedstock suppliers urgently need to be integrated at the start of the supply chain to sustain demand from bio-refining processes.

Furthermore we need to invest in building the partnerships and infrastructure that integrates bio-based industries across sectors. This will stimulate partnerships with end-markets creating a 'market pull' for bio-based products. This way, European citizens will feel the benefits of the bio-based economy to the environment and society.

About the author

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