



Press Release

Crop Consortium to meet at Clontarf Castle

A European research group which aims to scientifically validate the efficacy of emerging technologies in agriculture, will meet in Clontarf Castle, Dublin on 11th -13th September, 2013. The project is headed by the University of Hohenheim in Germany and more than 50 delegates from over 11 different EU countries will be in attendance. The consortium, 'BIOFECTOR', consists of 7 universities, 5 research institutions and 9 SMEs and will host its second meeting in Ireland, the location of two of its partners, BioAtlantis Ltd., Tralee, Co. Kerry and the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute, Belfast, Co. Antrim (N.I.).

The specific aims of BIOFECTOR are:

To develop means of

- Increasing stress resistance, the efficiency of nutrient uptake and finally crop yield via application of beneficial microbes and active natural compounds based on plant and compost extracts, collectively known as 'Bio-effectors'.
- Optimising alternatives to mineral fertilization (e.g. organic farming, low input agriculture, fertilisers based on waste recycling products) by combination with specifically adapted bio-effectors.
- To improve and disseminate knowledge on the benefits of the above.

The project involves a series of university-led laboratory and field trials in northern and southern regions of Europe. This ensures that technologies undergo stringent validation under different climatic conditions. Technologies under evaluation include 'Bio-effector' products based on beneficial bacteria and fungi such as *Bacillus*, *Pseudomonas* and *Trichoderma* and use of biostimulants which can influence plant physiology to improve crop yield and quality. Amongst the

biostimulants under study are plant extracts, signal compounds, humic acids, and compost extracts. Bioactive molecules derived from seaweeds and developed by BioAtlantis Ltd. and Agriges S.r.l. will also be assessed, with particular focus placed on commercial crops including maize, wheat and tomato. BioAtlantis Ltd.'s main product is called Super Fifty®, an extract of brown seaweed (*Ascophyllum nodosum*) which contains high levels of antioxidants.

A number of laboratory trials and first field experiments have already been completed within the consortium's first year and will be subject to much discussion and scientific debate in Clontarf Castle prior to the commencement of larger field trial programmes in the upcoming months. BIOFECTOR is funded to the tune of €6 million by the European Community's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007-2013; grant agreement n° 312117) and will complete its work by 31st August 2017. The project represents a strong investment by the EU towards identifying robust SME-developed technologies proven at the highest level to enhance crop performance, growth and yield and reduce inputs of environmentally problematic agrochemicals. It is hoped that this work will contribute to the growing push in Europe towards more sustainable agriculture.

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