

Press release

Brussels, 14th September 2010

Belgian Presidency and European Commission hold major conference on a sustainable bio-economy

The Belgian Presidency, together with the European Commission, holds today in Brussels a conference on building a Knowledge based Bio-Economy. The European bio-economy is estimated to be worth over € 2 trillion, employing around 22 million people, and the prospects for further growth are promising. Senior scientists, stakeholders and European and national policy makers take are discussing the drivers of the Bio-Economy and the research and innovation requirements to build the Bio-Economy.

Commissioner for Research, Innovation and Science Máire Geoghegan-Quinn said: *"The Belgian Presidency and the Commission are in complete agreement about the need for a more coherent approach to the bio-economy in the EU, and this conference is an important step. The bio-economy has the potential to address many of the things Europeans care most about: food security, reducing the environmental impact of agriculture and industry, providing healthy food at affordable cost, supporting coastal and rural development, reducing and recycling of bio-waste."*

However, research policy in this area is fragmented between Member States and some industrial technologies are subject to increasing competition from overseas. The European Commission wants to increase coherence at both European and national level, with a stronger engagement of end-users, so that new ideas can be brought more rapidly to the European marketplace and so that societal challenges are better addressed. One of the Belgian presidency objectives for the research council is to seek a European approach for a sustainable society through building a sustainable economy.

Generating new uses for renewable natural resources will enable Europe to boost the role of rural and coastal economies, including agriculture, forest-based, and marine resources. Meanwhile, environmental restrictions on agricultural production, together with intensified competition for land for feed and food, will require new approaches to ensure the availability of safe, nutritious and affordable food.

Bio-economy in Flanders

Minister for Science and Innovation Ingrid Lieten states that European regions and member states such as Flanders are taking action to implement the bio-economy in a public private partnership with stakeholders.

The chemical industry in Flanders has launched a strategy for greening industrial processes and production from the newly set-up Belgian SusChem platform. SMEs and research centres developing innovative second generation technologies for an improved Bio-economy join forces in the Flemish CINBIOS/FlandersBio network.

Flanders is also engaged in cross-country collaborations. Within the 21 million euro INTERREG project Biobase Europe shared by Flanders, Zeeland, and the European

Commission, an open access industrial biotechnology pilot plant is to open its doors to pre-industrial innovation projects in October 2010.

Alongside the conference, an exhibition of selected bio-based products ranges from food and feed to the prototype of the first bio-based tyre, a collaboration between European and US industry.

Background

The Commission is investing about €2 billion in European Food, Agriculture and Fisheries, and Biotechnology research through the 7th Research Framework Programme (FP7). The current call for proposals to help build the Knowledge Based BioEconomy is worth €240 million.

The knowledge based bio-economy generates sustainable growth by using renewable biological resources from land and aquatic environment as inputs to sectors such as the food and feed industries, chemicals, detergents, paper and pulp, textiles, bio-fuels and biogas. Progress in the biosciences helps “green” industry, reduce waste, and enhance consumer protection and well-being. It encompasses established economic sectors such as agriculture, forestry, fisheries, aquaculture, food and chemicals and energy which, in many cases, benefit from a whole chain approach to production and processing.

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