

German Bioeconomy Council calls for political commitment to agricultural innovation

More than 60 ministers for food and agriculture will kick-off this years International Green Week in Berlin with a debate on digitalisation and innovation trends. Looking ahead to future trends in the food and agriculture sector, the German Bioeconomy Council is calling for a modernization of the genetic engineering legislation in the EU.

The Bioeconomy Council expects that, in future, the food and agriculture sector will be increasingly influenced by the interaction of digital and biological innovations. Biological and digital innovations are complementary and mutually supportive. In plant breeding, for example it is now possible to screen through huge quantities of genetic data to identify desired properties. This means that plant breeding becomes quicker and less prone to error. Fields can be farmed more sustainably by using apps that monitor weather, plant and soil data. This knowledge not only assists in the reduction of chemicals and water usage but also allows the development of new products, such as microbial fertilisers. Some of these innovations will be presented at the International Green Week 2019.

As evidenced by the debate on digitalisation in Germany, political commitment is required. Digitalisation and biological innovations do not happen in a vacuum. They require infrastructure and framework conditions that reflect the current state of technology. Looking ahead to future trends in the sector, the Bioeconomy Council is calling for a modernization of the European Genetic Engineering legislation. 2019 offers the opportunity and optimum time-window to put the revision on the political agenda for the new EU Parliament, so that the EU Commission can act on it quickly. "The German Government's initiative and support for updating the legislation, which dates back to the 1990s, is especially important in Brussels," explains Christine Lang, Co-Chair of the Bioeconomy Council.

"Additionally, it is important to talk to leading innovators outside the EU as well," insists Joachim von Braun, Co-Chair of the Bioeconomy Council. "Countries such as the USA, China and Japan are updating their legal frameworks and creating corresponding standards for biological and digital innovations." If this results in significant differences in the approval processes and labelling requirements, Europe will be impacted as an innovation location. It will also make it more difficult to provide consumers with transparent and reliable labelling of foodstuffs.

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About the Bioeconomy Council of the Federal German Government:

The Bioeconomy Council advises the Federal German Government on the implementation of the National Research Strategy Bioeconomy 2030 towards a biobased economy. It is the Council's aim to establish a cross-sectoral knowledge-based bioeconomy, which generates sustainable products and services, thus combining economic growth with the objective of environmental compatibility. The Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL) established the current Bioeconomy Council as an independent advisory board to the Federal Government in 2012. The Council is led by two co-chairs, Prof. Dr. Christine Lang and Prof. Dr. Joachim von Braun. The central task of the 17 members of the council, whose expertise covers a wide spectrum of the bioeconomy, is to search for ways and means towards sustainable solutions and to present their findings in a global context. The Council encourages an open dialogue with the general public. It also provides recommendations on how education and training as well as research and development can best be promoted. The Council's activities are aligned with both long-term objectives and current political requirements. www.bioekonomierat.de