



WBF Newsletter 6th June 2022

Welcome to first post-COVID issue of the World Bioprotection Forum quarterly newsletter, which summarises proceedings from the Annual World BioProtection Summit & Awards (AWBSA) 2022 that took place on 23-24, at the NEC, Birmingham, UK.

The World BioProtection Forum (WBF) is a not-for-profit organisation founded to address some of the issues unique to the biocontrol sector. Dominated by small enterprises and start-ups, biocontrol companies frequently struggle in the face of regulatory challenges and financial pressures – barriers that can prevent important innovations from reaching the market.

The AWBSA is the WBF's flagship event, intended to address these challenges over a dedicated 2-day event. Demonstrating a strong return to in-person events following the COVID pandemic, this year's AWBSA welcomed 38 speakers from across the world to present the latest innovations in biocontrol products, formulation, and application, as well as regulations, investment, and commercialisation. The event was attended by delegates from over 20 countries.

Connecting the biocontrol sector and global challenges

Dr Minshad Ansari, Founder and Chairman of WBF, welcomed all participants and noted in his opening remarks that, despite high growth in the biopesticides market, industry is still struggling with lengthy and costly regulatory processes, especially in the EU. The number of successful registrations in the EU, US, India, China, and Brazil over the past 5 decades are unlikely to fill growing gaps in the market, considering that the EU is preparing to remove 505 pesticides by 2030 and increase organic farming from 8 to 25%. Dr Ansari pointed out that unless regulatory processes for new biological products are simplified to enable a greater number of innovations of innovations to reach the market, such EU targets are unlikely to be reached. He invited the biocontrol industry to join the WBF and support the organisation's campaign for regulatory reform in the UK and beyond. He said, "Together, We can."



Guest speaker Natalie Bennett, The RT. HON. The Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle (Former UK Green Party Leader), presented a powerful and heartfelt talk on the challenges the world faces on food security. As governments, regulators, farmers, and consumers across the globe show an ever-greater interest in sustainable agriculture and reduced use of chemical pesticides, biocontrol offers an attractive solution to maintaining crop yields without damaging the planet's systems that feed us. She thanked the WBF for the opportunity to talk to colleagues in the biocontrol industry and assured those present of her support as the sector works to address the various challenges we face.



Speakers from OroAgri, UPL Ltd, Pheronym, Botanical Solution Inc and Valent Biosciences described some of the recent developments in product innovation, from the development of 'fusion' products to novel strategies for pest control and a celebration of 50 years of DiPel biological insecticide, which is now providing effective pest control in 60 countries.

Innovations and formulation experts reflected the use of advanced formulation technologies such as microencapsulation, and tools such as artificial intelligence, machine learning in targeted applications in sustainable agriculture. Using such advanced modern technologies to optimise product development, formulation and application, the efficacy and persistence of biocontrol solutions has never been better.

With speakers travelling to attend the meeting from as far away as Chile and Australia, examined how new microbials and plant excrete can be part of sustainable crop protection in this global event, representing the full state of industry innovation worldwide. A full list of presentations and speakers comprising the program can be found [here](#), with links for WBF members and registered delegates to view copies of the presentation slides.

In the words of one of the keynote speakers, Dr Willem Ravensberg, Corporate Senior Regulatory Governmental Affairs Manager at Koppert Biological Systems, "We don't need more chemicals – nature has the solutions."

However, as anyone in the biocontrol sector is aware, even solutions provided by nature need to be regulated, and this has been a long-standing challenge for the sector.



Realistic and Achievable Biopesticide Reform

The biocontrol sector has been plagued by difficulties in the regulatory system for the past 40 years, and several delegates at AWBSA 2022 admitted that they had dedicated their entire careers to trying to reform a system that does not work, with very limited success. The regulatory system – especially in the EU – is slow, expensive and complicated which has serious impact on the growth.

Many of these issues were summarised in a session dedicated to realistic and achievable regulatory reform, featuring speakers from BASF, the Pesticide Action Network, APIS UK and IDRG – the full session can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ogJhNX25ba0&t=2937s>



Earlier this year, new data requirements for microbials were announced in European Parliament. However, as the delegates at AWBSA 2022 were quick to point out, the new requirements do little to address the issues they face. Although widely promoted as a success story for the biocontrol sector, in fact, it was AWBSA delegates' general opinion that they will do little to change the fact that EU regulatory approvals for new biopesticides are too slow, too expensive, and too complicated.

It was therefore very refreshing to hear from Dr Amanda Porter, Senior Science Advisor at DEFRA (UK), who came to AWBSA 2022 with the clear determination to better understand the issues facing the sector, and to make sure those issues are considered in the upcoming reforms of UK biopesticide regulations. Dr Porter attended AWBSA 2022 following recent discussions between DEFRA and a group of WBF advisors, with the express intention of inviting views on how the upcoming UK reforms could make the regulations better for the sector while retaining robust risk assessment.



The WBF has been working since mid-2021 on a campaign for reform for biopesticide regulations in the UK, having spotted the opportunity to help guide post-Brexit regulatory reforms. The WBF is the only organisation to have spotted this opportunity to offer support to the UK government, and is continuing to provide guidance and support (e.g. through the development of an authoritative white paper summarising challenges and opportunities – not just in the UK, but globally) and we are optimistic that through sensible & honest dialogue with DEFRA, better UK regulations will be a significant first step.

Success now depends on the sector's support – although there appeared to be unanimous support from the AWBSA delegates for the WBF's campaign, supporting companies are now urgently required to commit funding support by joining the WBF. Membership fees will be used to advance the campaign and guide changes to UK regulations, which can then be used as a high-quality test case for reform elsewhere.

Investment and Acceleration



A session dedicated to commercialisation, investment and acceleration saw speakers from Syngenta, Anchored Inand Innovate UK discussed the complex challenges of entrepreneurship, and the value of industry partnerships and acquisitions.

This session was followed by the InvestorReady pitches – a dynamic series of pitches from companies such as AG Bio Systems, MedinBio and AEH Gelponics, as company speakers braved the WBF ‘Dragons’ with a short pitch to raise investment and/or industry partners to help develop or expand their businesses.

The best Investor Ready pitch was awarded to Dr Beenish Siddique, who started AEH Gelponics with university funding at the time of finishing her PhD -within a year, Dr Siddique had secured a £1 million investment grant from Innovate UK, and she has also since raised £3.5 million in equity investment. She now employs 12 colleagues and is providing her sustainable growth substrate for plants across the world.

New innovation in exhibition

A dozen biocontrol companies, academic organisations, and service providers (including patent and legal advisors), exhibited and presented their innovations and services in field of biocontrol agriculture in a dedicated exhibition area.



Acknowledging excellence

Established to celebrate achievements in biocontrol and the biological agriculture industry, the World BioProtection Awards acknowledged some of the biocontrol sector’s finest innovations at a stylish gala dinner during AWBSA 2022. Dr Ansari opened this Awards evening by congratulating all finalists, and thanking sponsors and everyone who nominated innovations, projects, individuals for these distinguished awards.

An eminent group of more than 20 expert judges had previously identified a shortlist of 38 finalists from 32 different organisations. Competition throughout the judging process was intense and made the job of choosing the final winners a very difficult task across all ten categories. These Award recognise outstanding achievements in biocontrol and biological agriculture.



Dr Minshad Ansari, Chairman of the WBF, said “These awards rightly celebrate & acknowledge innovation in new products for biological agriculture. They also recognise that starting & running a business, product development, raising investment, collaborating with partners, regulations, & commercialisation... all these things, they involve abilities and expertise necessary for commercial, as well as scientific, success. All these skills – and the Award winners that demonstrate them are the key to our sector’s future.”

Nominations for the 2023 World BioProtection Awards will be opening soon!

To conclude

With increasing pressures to make agriculture more sustainable, against a backdrop of climate change and a growing world population that is predicted to reach 9 billion by 2050, the need for new innovations that reduce our impact on the planet while maintaining or increasing crop yields, has never been so urgent. The biocontrol sector is rising to this challenge, with a fascinating array of innovations to optimise targeted product efficacy.

However, regulations continue to present a barrier to enabling farmers to use those innovations, and the WBF requests the support of all companies involved in the sector to support the regulatory campaign, which has already established the basis for advising DEFRA on the upcoming UK regulatory reforms, and is looking further ahead for global impact that will make registration of new biocontrol products quicker, less expensive and less complex... the end of our 40 years of frustration could be in sight, but we need your support to fund the campaign.

Visit <https://www.worldbioprotectionforum.com/> to become a member of the WBF and support the campaign. Please help us to make the changes you need and don't miss this opportunity for change.

Because really... we enjoyed AWBSA as much as everyone else, but we don't want to still be having these same conversations about regulations for another 40 years!