



ERIAFF NEWS

European Regions for Innovation in Agriculture, Food and Forestry

SPECIAL
EDITION



ERIAFF Annual Conference 2025 in Vic, Catalonia



Cristina Massot, Deputy Director of Catalonia's Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Fisheries and Food, opened the ERIAFF Annual Conference and BIT Congress, held in Vic from April 7 to 9. In her opening speech, she welcomed international experts and reaffirmed Catalonia's commitment to a sustainable bioeconomy. She highlighted the region's four-year-old Bioeconomy Strategy, which focuses on the utilization of local biomass, rural development, and ecosystem preservation.

Massot emphasized the success of the BIT Congress as a platform for knowledge exchange and collaboration, underlining the importance of cross-sector and international partnerships through networks like ERIAFF. She noted that hosting this year's ERIAFF Conference further strengthens both local and European ties.

Massot called on regions to actively engage in shaping the updated EU Bioeconomy Strategy through the ongoing public consultation, stressing the need to scale up innovations while maintaining environmental responsibility. Her key message: regional collaboration is essential for building a sustainable and resilient future. She encouraged participants to actively connect, exchange ideas, and help drive the bioeconomy forward throughout the conference.

More information:

[Catalan Bioeconomy Strategy](#)
[2025 ERIAFF Conference](#)

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The regional contribution to the European Bioeconomy Strategy

Jorge Molina Villanueva



We need an updated Bioeconomy Strategy to address, among other elements, the gaps identified in the 2022 Progress Report, to increase policy coherence across different sectors, and to ensure alignment with upcoming initiatives. It is essential to accelerate the adoption of circular economy principles in bioeconomy applications, to scale up activities from “lab to fab,” and to enhance industrialization, biotechnology, and biomanufacturing. We also need to boost innovations that deliver high-tech, high-value-added products and materials.

Biomass is produced and largely valorized at the local and regional levels. Regional initiatives will add value to the important work already underway in the Member States.

Moreover, circular bioeconomy initiatives at the regional level can help connect existing regional innovation ecosystems and clusters across the EU. The Regional Innovation Valleys for Bioeconomy and Food Systems initiative is also supporting this effort under the umbrella of the New European Innovation Agenda Communication, published in 2022.

The ongoing public consultation on the Bioeconomy Strategy is open until 23 June 2025 on the “Have Your Say” portal (Towards a Circular, Regenerative and Competitive Bioeconomy). Building on the significant achievements of the 2018 EU Bioeconomy Strategy and considering the latest trends in the EU bioeconomy, the updated Strategy aims to further support citizens, regions, and key economic sectors—including agriculture, forestry, fisheries, biomanufacturing, and biotechnology industries and services. Courage!

Regional Voices Shape Future EU Bioeconomy Strategy

At the ERIAFF Annual Conference 2025, regions from across Europe gathered for a dynamic session on the forthcoming revision of the EU Bioeconomy Strategy. Held in an engaging fishbowl format, the session encouraged open dialogue, with representatives rotating in and out to share diverse regional perspectives. Participants discussed local policy approaches, innovation strategies, and the importance of circularity in building a resilient bioeconomy. The discussion highlighted the critical role of regions in driving Europe’s green transition and called for active engagement in the EU’s ongoing public consultation. Insights gathered during the session will feed into a joint ERIAFF position paper.

[Joint declaration by European regional networks on the EU’s Bioeconomy Strategy.](#)

Living Labs for Climate Change Adaptation and Soil Health: Sharing Regional Experiences

The ERIAFF Annual Conference 2025 hosted an engaging roundtable session focused on Living Labs as tools for climate change adaptation and soil health. Representatives from various European regions shared experiences, methodologies, and challenges, fostering a lively exchange of ideas and a strong spirit of collaboration. The session highlighted the importance of multi-stakeholder engagement and locally tailored solutions in addressing environmental issues. Participants explored how Living Labs can drive innovation, support sustainability, and enhance regional resilience. The discussion provided valuable insights and sparked new connections, reinforcing the potential of Living Labs to tackle critical environmental challenges through cross-border cooperation.

[European Network on Living Labs](#)

Showcasing Innovative Projects in the Agrifood Sector

During this session, key initiatives driving sustainability and the circular economy were showcased. Eduard Mauri presented the [EU-FarmBook](#), a platform for knowledge sharing in the agricultural sector. Annalisa Santucci shared [Biocastanea](#)’s progress in transforming chestnut burrs into patented, zero-waste solutions. Alba Graells and Anna Sagrera highlighted Catalonia’s pioneering work in food loss prevention through the [FOLOU project](#). Bruno Navajas introduced [second-generation biorefineries](#), designed to close resource loops and maximize efficiency. Alberto Ceccon presented [SUSTAIN](#), a project focused on valorizing grape pomace to create new circular products.

These projects underscore Europe’s leadership in developing innovative and sustainable solutions across the agrifood landscape.





Transformative innovation: R&I priorities and the scaling up challenges

Neus Puy

Transformative innovation is essential for addressing global challenges, but scaling these innovations from laboratory research to commercial application remains complex. One of the main barriers is the communication gap between researchers, industry, policymakers, and the public. Transparent, evidence-based communication is crucial to build trust, attract funding, and reduce resistance to change.



In addition, legislative barriers and outdated regulatory frameworks often slow the adoption and scaling of transformative solutions. Limited access to infrastructure, skilled talent, and financial resources further hinders progress.

Innovation hubs play a vital role by connecting diverse stakeholders, providing shared resources, and fostering collaborative ecosystems that accelerate scaling. Companies can help overcome barriers by promoting cross-sector partnerships and using clear, evidence-based messaging to demonstrate the societal benefits of their innovations.

Emerging technologies, such as AI and digital platforms, can also facilitate scaling by improving knowledge transfer and streamlining development processes. However, supportive regulatory frameworks remain lacking in many areas.

Strong, targeted communication and the strategic use of innovation hubs are key to enhancing the successful scaling of transformative solutions.

Business perspective of a bio-based products and services transition

Víctor Falguera

At the ERIAFF Annual Conference 2025, representatives from the CBE JU, the European Investment Bank, and the EU Bioeconomy Clusters Alliance reflected on the business dimension of scaling up bio-based solutions. The panel emphasized that bringing innovation to market requires more than just technology and funding. It also demands viable business models, aligned regulatory frameworks, investment readiness, and collaboration across actors and sectors—effectively “breaking the silos.”

Demonstration plants and flagship biorefineries have been paving the way, especially in recent years, as raw materials have expanded from solely agricultural by-products to a diverse range of sources. However, barriers such as feedstock volatility, lack of standards, and limited market visibility persist.



To be considered “bankable,” a project must demonstrate technical feasibility, economic credibility (including robust risk assessment), environmental value, and alignment with available financial instruments. Clusters play a key role in supporting SMEs by connecting them to infrastructure, market intelligence, and funding opportunities.

The discussion also acknowledged that large companies are essential for globally de-risking investments and creating market pull.

Summarizing the discussion, the panel concluded with a clear recommendation for Europe to leverage the current geopolitical context and transform the bioeconomy into a competitive asset for the continent: “Stop writing strategies. Get it done.”

More information: [European Circular Bioeconomy Fund \(ECBF\)](#).





FIELD VISITS

Learn, Observe, Share Experience!

Forestry Hub of Catalonia. Bio-circular Transformation Centre

Pau Brunet Navarro

Relevant future challenges in Catalonia are climate change with increasing temperatures and changes in precipitation patterns, and rural depopulation and abandonment of rural economic activities with consequences on biomass accumulation. Both challenges contribute to increase the risk of natural disturbances such as wildfires.

The Forest Science and Technology Centre of Catalonia (CTFC) aims at transforming vulnerable landscapes into resilient ones supporting the implementation of innovative value chains: aromatic and medicinal plants for pharma and cosmetics, truffle and other non-wood products for food, and wood for green chemistry, construction and carpentry.

This concept was explained during the field visit at the CTFC headquarters in Solsona and complemented with a visit to the new facilities of the Forestry Hub of Catalonia that include laboratories for CLT and glulam pre-industrial manufacturing, a biorefinery-thermochemical pilot plant, equipment for drying and distilling plants, and a cooking demonstration area and classification of fungi.

More information: [CTFC](#)



IRTA Monells: Circular Economy in Livestock Farming

Núria Bentoldrà Boladeres

Participants of the ERIAFF 2025 conference visited IRTA's Monells Cattle Station (EVAM) to learn about circular economy strategies in livestock farming. The visit showcased technologies and practices aimed at improving sustainability on farms, including precision systems for irrigation, fertilisation, and animal feeding; composting of manure for animal bedding; biogas production through a rural digester; solar energy; and water reuse systems. Visitors also discovered IRTA's work on regenerative agriculture and sustainable grazing using forest undergrowth. This initiative is part of the Agroecología Circular and Bioenergía demonstration projects, supported by the Catalan Climate Change Fund, and reflects IRTA's commitment to innovation and ecological transition in the agri-food sector.

More info: [Agroecología Circular project – IRTA](#)



BETA Technological Center and Murucuc Farm: from Research to Practice in Circular Bioeconomy

Cèlia Guixé



As part of the ERIAFF Annual Conference, participants visited the BETA Technological Center and Murucuc Farm to discover innovations in sustainable rural development and circular bioeconomy.

At BETA TC, the centre's work was presented, highlighting a team of over 100 professionals and involvement in 60 European projects, 45 of which are currently active. The technical tour included laboratories and pilot plants focused on nutrient recovery, soil health, and nature-based solutions.

At Murucuc Farm, participants were introduced to systems for managing cow manure, including solid-liquid separation and a biological nitrogen treatment system (NDN). The visit concluded at the farm's experimental Kernza field—a perennial grain studied within the NutriBudget project to improve nutrient efficiency.

The field visit showcased how applied research is driving the transition toward more circular and sustainable agriculture. You can find more information at the following link: <https://betatechcenter.com/>



Notes from ERIAFF Working Groups

Fostering Collaboration Across ERIAFF Working Groups: Joint Session on Agroecology, Food Systems, Sustainable Proteins & Plants

Miia Paanenen

Four ERIAFF Working Groups—Agroecology, Food Systems, Sustainable Proteins, and Plants—joined forces for a collaborative session on 9 April at the 2025 ERIAFF Annual Conference in Vic, Catalonia. The hybrid meeting aimed to strengthen synergies and explore cross-cutting opportunities. Highlights included updates on the FutureFoodS and Agroecology Partnerships from Nikola Hassan and Ulrike Ziegler, a keynote on agroecology and sustainability by Professor Maria Rosa Mosquera Losada, and insights on EU policy linking WG priorities. The session concluded with an open discussion on shared interests, best practices, and ideas for future cooperation.

Food, Health & Nutrition Innovation

Minna Storm

Our new ERIAFF Working Group champions the empowerment of health within food and nutrition innovation. We align regional capacities—spanning proactive health, novel (as well as local and traditional) foods and ingredients, digital solutions, and public awareness—with EU funding, networking, and policy ambitions. Member contributions reflect strong expertise in project development, science, sustainable production, and citizen engagement—supporting capacity building and international collaboration. Through expert-led monthly online sessions and annual physical gatherings, we aim to formulate transregional solutions, influence Horizon Europe calls, and strengthen our collective impact. The more regions we engage, the stronger our voice becomes in shaping future EU health-focused food systems innovation.

Welcome to join and contact: Minna Storm, Chair of WG Health, Nutrition and Food Innovation

High Tech Farming

Alessandra Gemmiti

The workshop, organized by the Precision Agriculture Working Group in collaboration with the S3 Platform for Precision Agriculture, began with an overview of the ERIAFF group's origins and development path. The discussion focused on improving governance structures following the 2024 signing of the Letter of Intent.

Coen de Graaf from Idea Consult, representing the S3 Community of Practice, shared insights from a survey aimed at strengthening demonstration activities and identifying opportunities in upcoming European funding calls. Lucia Cavigli (CNR) and Elias Holzknicht (LIDO) gave presentations on photonics sensing for plant stress and fruit maturity monitoring and an outdoor lab for evaluating apple-growing sensors, respectively. All the talks led to a lively and collaborative discussion with strong participation from everyone present.

Communication

Elisabetta Cecchi

Our work began before the Conference with the preparation of the newsletter, followed by gathering partners' contributions to develop a new communication strategy during the meeting. Using a Menti survey, participants highlighted the need to involve policymakers more and to employ more targeted tools in addition to websites and newsletters. Thanks to valuable insights from Professor Brunori ([PAGE UNIP](#)), we reflected on innovative approaches to inspire both internal and external audiences. We now invite everyone to contribute ideas to our [open board](#). Stay connected!

Social Innovation

Antonella Passarani

Within the Social Innovation Working Group, the Silver Agri Age project was highlighted. This initiative, promoted by Marche Region, transforms farms like Bagalini and La Castelletta into care spaces for elderly people with mild cognitive disorders. Adapting the Montessori method, it combines nature-based tasks, sensory activities, and shared meals to promote autonomy, well-being, and intergenerational connections outside traditional healthcare. Collaboration with institutions (CIM, INRCA, UNIVPM), social services, and families ensures integration within existing care networks. The project has established replicable good practices and contributed to regional policies recognizing social farming as a key tool for social and healthcare innovation in rural areas.

Missions: Consortium Building

Concha Civantos

The WG Missions aimed to boost collaboration among ERIAFF partners by highlighting ongoing projects developed within the network under Horizon Europe Missions. A dedicated workshop guided participants in assessing their strengths and potential contributions to future EU Mission topics. Experts provided hands-on support to refine ideas and align them with funding calls. Participants also presented their expertise on selected topics, creating a highly collaborative environment and setting the stage for future joint initiatives. The ultimate goal was to identify concrete opportunities to develop project proposals for 2025.

European Forested Regions and Bioeconomy & Resilience

Tiina Pakkari

During the joint working group meeting, the participants had an opportunity to learn more about Forest Europe, a pan-European high-level forest policy process. In this regard, the possibility for ERIAFF to become an observer of the platform was discussed, providing a great opportunity for future collaboration. The diverse EU forest-related policies and objectives from the national and regional perspective were also examined in the meeting, shedding light on the complexity of the current framework. In addition, the meeting covered three project pitches related to forest innovation and landscape resilience, further highlighting the benefits of collaboration and research in the sector.





Luc Haverkamp

Looking forward to 2026: ERIAFF Annual Conference focused on Regional food systems

SAVE THE DATE 11-13 May 2026 Amsterdam

2026 ERIAFF 12th Annual Conference- Regional food systems, balancing the Economic, Ecological, Environmental, and Social innovations.

In 2026, the 12th Annual ERIAFF Conference will take place in the Netherlands, with Amsterdam as its vibrant host city. For this special edition, all Dutch ERIAFF regions have joined forces to co-organize the event, reflecting the collaborative spirit that defines our country.

The conference explores the key theme of regional food systems and the delicate balance between economy, ecology, spatial planning, and social well-being. We aim to showcase the beauty, diversity, and innovation the Netherlands has to offer, while also being open about the challenges we face.

We are eager to learn how other ERIAFF regions are addressing similar issues and to discover the strengths they bring to the table. Join us for an inspiring experience filled with dialogue, exchange, and collaboration—to learn from one another and move forward together.

ERIAFF Your network for collaboration

JOIN US!

ERIAFF remains open to new adhesions and welcomes you to the 2025 Special edition of the Newsletter.

We are pleased to cooperate with organizations and projects that share the same values and objectives as our network.

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