

Building Europe's leadership in food biotechnology: Priorities for EU research and innovation funding

The next EU Framework Programme (FP10) and the European Competitiveness Fund (ECF) are a strategic opportunity to set ambitious priorities on food biotechnology, treating innovative food products – and alternative proteins in particular – as a core pillar of a sustainable, resource-efficient, and resilient bioeconomy.

With its [strong research base](#), the EU can convert scientific excellence into technology deployment and global leadership through targeted, open-access R&I. However, other regions are moving faster, leveraging food biotechnology innovations to increase competitiveness and address societal challenges such as [climate change](#) and [building a resilient food supply](#). FP10 and ECF should provide the research and innovation pathway for Europe to secure its leadership in food biotechnology.

Recommendations for FP10 and the ECF

Summary

1. Embed food biotechnology, including alternative proteins, as a **key strategic priority under Pillar II of FP10**.
2. Ensure that FP10 and ECF are consistent in including **'innovative food products' in the definitions of both biotechnology and bioeconomy**.
3. Ensure that funding under the policy window 'Health, Biotech, Agriculture and Bioeconomy' is **balanced and proportionate across the four areas of the window**.
4. **Ring-fence FP10 R&I funding for basic research** aimed at solving fundamental challenges.
5. **Create a dedicated public-private partnership** modelled on the success of the [Circular Bio-based Europe Joint Undertaking](#) (CBE-JU), but focused on food biotechnology.
6. **Fund all projects of excellence with a focus on technical research** under FP10 to maintain researcher motivation and unlock high-potential innovations.
7. **Expand consortia-based projects and twinning programmes** to foster cross-border collaboration and accelerate technology uptake.
8. **Fund innovation centres of excellence** that connect academia, startups, and industry.

Food biotechnology as a strategic priority

To develop a competitive and world-leading food biotechnology sector in the EU, it is essential to include adequate funding for food biotechnology under Pillar II of FP10. As a subset, securing a resilient and diversified protein value chain in Europe should be a priority.

Definitions should be consistent in recognising this as a key priority. The EFC proposal **recognises innovative food products as a key area of the bioeconomy**, but not of biotechnology. This lacks consistency as biotechnology is a key enabling tool of the bioeconomy. The FP10 regulation does not define either term.

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Basic research to create an innovation pipeline

The proposal to link FP10 and ECF is a strategic decision that will help the food biotechnology sector grow, but it must be ensured that there is still adequate funding for basic research.

Open-access, lower TRL (technology readiness level) research is needed to achieve technical outcomes which are crucial to commercial growth, such as research to **improve the taste and texture of alternative proteins** and to advance the use of agricultural sidestreams for fermentation-based foods. Low TRL research on alternative proteins is also essential to **create a pipeline of new research that can be picked up by industry and startups**, therefore avoiding duplicative R&I within the private sector.

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Secure the role of food biotechnology in a Joint Undertaking

An institutionalised **food biotechnology public-private partnership is needed to drive forward investment in the sector**. Given its success, the Circular Bio-Based Europe Joint Undertaking ([CBE-JU](#)) model should be replicated as a ‘Food Biotechnology Joint Undertaking’, bringing in funding from large, innovative companies in Europe leading in this space, member states who are already investing, and the European Commission.

While food is in the scope of CBE-JU, a very small amount of funding has been directed to this topic. The focus should be on, inter alia, boosting infrastructure, connecting the value chain, and ensuring that research is translated into commercial success. **Public-private partnerships** are

crucial, given their role in sending a signal to investors, and thereby increasing confidence and private-sector investment.

5. **Create a dedicated public–private partnership** modelled on the success of CBE-JU, but focused on food biotechnology.

Increase levels of funding

All projects of excellence with a focus on technical research should be funded. Horizon Europe calls for alternative proteins have been heavily oversubscribed, with only two to three projects typically funded per call. This low funding rate is discouraging researchers and innovators from submitting a proposal.

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Ensure strong collaboration

FP10 Pillar II should not lose its focus on collaborative research, and should continue to expand investment into pre-competitive, collaborative projects, such as consortia-based projects or twinning programmes. This format creates stronger knowledge exchange between researchers and companies, benefiting companies by giving access to leading knowledge, benefiting researchers via connection to the business world’s needs, and benefiting the overall sector by **ensuring uptake of new technologies**.

The EU should **fund innovation centres of excellence** focused on bringing together researchers, universities and companies and acting as an accelerator. There are several examples of these, such as the [CellFood Hub](#) in Denmark, [CiPA](#) in Catalonia, [Biotech Heights](#) in Sweden, and [NAPIC](#) in the UK, but there is much more latent potential in Europe.

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