Up to three million euros in funding  
Leading-edge cluster in search of SME cooperation partners from business and industry

The Leading-Edge BioEconomy Cluster is looking for small and medium sized partners from business and industry to cooperate on its project “Beechwood International” (BWI). The project was proclaimed as a winner of last year’s competition “Internationalization of Leading-Edge Clusters” put on by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, receiving extensive funding to integrate small and medium-sized companies in Germany. A “kick off” workshop was held on March 1 in Central Germany to discuss initial ideas and concrete ways to participate.

Direct access to research, knowledge and grants for companies

The BioEconomy Cluster is located in Central Germany and, as a cross-sector value-creation network, connects the wood production and processing industry with the chemical and energy-conversion industry as part of a network within the chemical region. The cluster specializes in value-creating utilization cascades for domestic beechwood. This extensive knowledge is to be expanded to include other raw materials as part of the “Beechwood International” project. The aim is to enhance the manufacturing of biobased intermediate products, semi-finished goods, composite materials and bioenergy carriers. The project focuses on cooperating with international partners that have complementary competencies and on the integration of small and medium-sized companies. Because the latter often possess specialized knowledge, technical know-how and the corresponding production facilities, but find it difficult to become part of international innovation networks on their own, the BioEconomy Cluster is actively encouraging participation. Through a membership in the Network for Excellency, SMEs can take part in the “Beechwood International” project and profit from comprehensive knowledge transfer, cross-sector synergies and funding opportunities.

Conception phase started

In February, the internationalization project began a two-year conception phase in which three research and innovation projects will be defined and initialized. A grant of a maximum of one million euros per project will be available. In order to internationally establish the material and energetic use of non-food biomass, like beechwood, and to facilitate market access of relevant products and services in other countries, the BioEconomy Cluster is partnering with the clusters Biobased Delta (the Netherlands), BioVale (Great Britain), CLIC (Finland), IAR (France) and SARI (China). Six more workshops are planned by the end of the year – for example in Lille, Amsterdam and Helsinki – in order to further present the project’s strategic course and to acquire international SME cooperation partners.

From microalgae to biobased composites

The first meeting demonstrated that the internationalization project has enormous collaboration potential. Even though the focus of the international cluster is on various different raw materials – from algae, to grains, to wood – the raw materials encounter one another in various ways in the course of their value chains, producing interesting synergies and contact points for SMEs organized within the BioEconomy Cluster.

Thus, some relevant areas of cooperation include biorefineries, the production of new enzymes for cellulose materials, the manufacturing of high-quality chemicals from waste streams in the food and pharmaceutical industries, and the production of molecules for the food, feed and pharmaceutical industries.
Small and medium-sized companies in Germany that have yet to take part in the Leading-Edge BioEconomy Cluster but which can imagine participating in these areas or are perhaps already working on innovative ideas in the bioeconomy sector, should take this opportunity to find out more about becoming a member of the Network for Excellence at www.bioeconomy.de.

Find out more about the workshop results on May 10 and 11 at the International Bioeconomy Conference in Halle

A perfect way to gain an initial impression of the work of the leading-edge cluster is to become acquainted with the results from the workshop and personally get to know representatives from the French partner cluster IAR at the 6th International Bioeconomy Conference in Halle an der Saale in May.

The conference was first organized by the ScienceCampus Halle in 2012 and has been jointly hosted by the Leading-Edge BioEconomy Cluster since 2015. Now it is one of the most important bioeconomy events in all of Germany. It brings together excellent scientific representatives, decision-makers, trademark holders and companies from Germany and Europe. The program this year will focus on four topics that are also relevant for the internationalization project: (1) aromas, fragrances and dietary supplements (2) grains, (3) wood and (4) plant-based oils. The partner country of the 2017 conference is France, which is represented by the cluster IAR.

More information and a registration form for the event can be found at http://www.bioeconomy-conference.de.

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As a value-added cluster, the BioEconomy Cluster in Central Germany is focused on the integrated and energetic use of non-food biomass for the generation of materials, chemicals, innovative products and energy sources. Our partners in industry and research are working on cross-sector value-creation chains and interlink the timber and forestry industry with the chemical and plastics industries, plant engineering and the energy sector.

In 2012, the cluster was selected as one of the award winners in the Leading-Edge Cluster Competition of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF).