ECBA · European Biology Briefing

July–September 2026 · 2026 Q3

Making nature restoration measurable

Austria's draft restoration plan, an Irish farm biorefinery and the FEMS leadership election.

1 September
Austria reports submitting its draft plan

€3m
Irish demonstration infrastructure

272
CBE JU funding proposals reported

Nature restoration and a demonstration biorefinery ask different questions of field evidence. Both need people who can describe what was measured, over what period and with what consequences for a place or a producer.

Association news

Member publications and media

Other organisations

Bio-based economy

Policy and reports

Association news

Spain: a new newsletter makes the work of the colleges visible

On **22 July**, CGCOB publicly announced the first issue of **Comunidad BIO**, intended to explain the work of the national council, territorial colleges and commissions. Its stated purpose includes transparency and sharing experience between colleges. Only the public announcement has been reviewed; the attachment described as an internal bulletin has not been opened or imported. E08

This is directly relevant to a European association publication. It shows a national body choosing to explain its own work to members. The intended benefit is reported as a purpose, rather than an evaluated improvement in understanding or participation.

CGCOB also reported a cooperation agreement with **Tragsa**, signed in Madrid on **9 July** and announced on 13 July. The public item establishes the signing; it does not provide evidence of subsequent jobs or other realised member benefits. E09

Estonia: an activities plan for 2026–2030 is under development

A July notice, updated in September, describes work on the Estonian Naturalists' Society's **2026–2030 activities plan**, scheduled for August–October. It includes member focus groups and a survey. The source establishes a development process; this briefing has not checked an adopted final plan. E13

Greece: PEV connects its congress with microbial applications

PEV's **28 September** programme announcement advertises its fifteenth national congress for **18–20 December in Thessaloniki**, including a round table on microbial applications for a sustainable future. This is the association's forthcoming programme, not a report of completed sessions or their results. The University of Thessaly's subject contribution is distinguished from PEV's organisational role. E10

Also in this quarter

- **Netherlands · education:** NIBI's 28 September listing announces registration for ‘Grenzen van het leven’. At the Q3 reference date this was an upcoming conference, not a completed event. L02

Member publications and media

Nutrition education deserves a place beside production technology

Bionieuws' September contents include a section on food education, while the Italian September Giornale dei Biologi includes environmental and microbiological subjects. The source review for this issue remains limited to publicly available issue descriptions and indexed material. N12 · N13 · N14

The editorial connection is nevertheless worth making explicit. A European account of food innovation becomes incomplete if it discusses how ingredients are produced but says little about how people understand them. Education, professional communication and production are related tasks with different evidence requirements.

For an association publication, the useful contribution is to make a claim understandable at the level where it can be judged. A statement about an ingredient should identify the ingredient and the intended property. A statement about a whole diet needs a wider frame. A statement about the production system needs an environmental and resource comparison.

The public may encounter all three on the same package or in the same discussion. A biologist's professional contribution is partly to keep the levels of inference clear. That can be done through a well-chosen example rather than a general lecture about misinformation.

The September selection therefore puts several forms of biology next to one another for a reason. The grass biorefinery concerns production and resource use. Restoration planning concerns ecosystem condition and evidence over time. Food education concerns interpretation and choices. Grant proposals concern the work that may become possible. Their connection is the need to explain what has been established and what decision it can support.

Ecology becomes useful advice when the decision is clear

The 28 September Bionieuws profile of CLM Onderzoek en Advies places the organisation between science, policy and agricultural practice. Its description focuses on making knowledge usable in sustainability decisions involving several interests. Only the public article excerpt and indexed text were available in this review. C13

The example is relevant because advisory work is a substantial kind of biological practice that can be less visible than research or teaching. The task is not finished when a result is technically correct. The intended user must understand which decision it informs, which assumptions matter and where the evidence leaves room for judgement.

An explicitly illustrative agricultural case might involve a practice that changes several outcomes at once. The adviser needs to identify the effects being assessed, the alternatives and the conditions under which a comparison is meaningful. The decision-maker then needs an account that preserves those relationships rather than compressing them into a single unqualified label.

This is not a claim that an adviser should decide every value conflict. Biological expertise can clarify consequences and uncertainty while leaving the decision and its wider responsibilities with the appropriate people. That distinction helps make the professional contribution credible.

For associations, a useful occupational account would show the work behind the advice: problem definition, evidence gathering, interpretation and communication. It could also explain the point at which another discipline or a separate mandate is needed.

The broader European lesson is that the bioeconomy includes services that help people use biological knowledge. A profile of such work can be as relevant to members as a report on a new production technology, provided it explains the task and avoids presenting a company's description as an independent measure of effectiveness.

> **Also in this quarter**
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> - **Netherlands · magazine:** Bionieuws, 14 September includes a food-education section. N12
> - **Italy · magazine:** Giornale dei Biologi's September issue includes the topics discussed above; the selection relies on the announcement and indexed cover text. N13 · N14

Other organisations

FEMS elects Michael Sauer and three trustees

FEMS delegates met in Stockholm on 4 September and elected Michael Sauer as their next president, alongside three new trustees. The federation’s 8 September announcement says Sauer is due to succeed Antonio Ventosa on 1 January 2027 for a three-year term. For national associations, FEMS offers a route into the microbiology community through its societies, journals and meetings.

FEMS election announcement

A route through the European association landscape

National organisation

Professional issues, education and member services

Start with the association that serves the country or field.

European specialist federation

Connections within a discipline

Use FEMS for microbiology societies, scientific meetings and publications.

Cross-discipline bodies

Issues spanning multiple fields or countries

Compare ECBA's professional remit and IUBS's international scientific remit.

FEMS's election is relevant as news from a European specialist federation. A national association can draw on specialist networks for expertise while keeping a wider view of the profession. The distinction matters when a board is looking for a professional counterpart, a specialist speaker or a scientific partner. The three routes above describe organisational roles. Specific affiliations are documented by the organisations themselves.

Also in this quarter

- **Marine microbiomes · online event:** FEMS circulated the BlueTools/BlueRemediomics infoday announcement for 30 September. The advertised focus was marine microbiomes and circular bioeconomy applications; attendance, proceedings and outcomes have not been verified. L07

Bio-based economy

An Irish grass biorefinery puts the value chain on a working farm

On 1 September, CBE JU reported the inauguration of a demonstration-scale grass biorefinery at Farm Zero C near Bandon in County Cork. The Irish government funded the €3 million infrastructure, while the European Rural BioReFarmeries project supports testing of the model. The facility separates fresh grass into a fibre-rich fraction and juice from which useful components may be recovered. Remaining streams can be directed towards anaerobic digestion. Food applications and other intended uses remain subject to development and the relevant assessment. C06

The interest for European biology is the combination of functions in one place. Instead of asking only whether a useful substance can be obtained from grass, the demonstration raises questions about the complete arrangement: the starting resource, the products, the remaining streams and the farm that must make the system work.

That is a more demanding question than maximising the amount of one component. Removing a useful fraction may change what remains for another purpose. A process needs to account for the destination and quality of all important streams, not only the most attractive output. Whether an arrangement is viable depends on those relationships.

For a biologist, the work can begin with the resource itself. The properties of a crop or harvest may vary over time and place. A process designed around an ideal material has to be tested against that variation. This is also where practical knowledge from producers becomes important: the timing and condition of supply can matter as much as its annual quantity.

The food, feed and material routes then raise different requirements. A fraction suitable for one use cannot be assumed suitable for another because it comes from the same biological source. Product characterisation, process control and the intended use determine which evidence is needed. The Irish project description acknowledges that some applications remain developmental.

The environmental comparison needs an equally complete account. A new process should be compared with the existing use of the grass and with the alternatives supplying the proposed products. That makes it possible to examine resource efficiency without assuming that the word biorefinery guarantees an improvement. A calculation that credits several products also needs to explain how benefits and burdens are assigned among them.

For associations whose membership spans agricultural, food and environmental work, the case illustrates why those specialisms should be in contact. A process decision can affect feed quality, nutrient flows, land management and industrial performance. No single professional title necessarily covers all of those questions.

It also provides a useful way to report European projects. Distinguish the infrastructure investment, the research programme and the expected business model. An inaugurated facility is a tangible step. It is not the same as a demonstrated result across several seasons, an established customer base or a transferable model for every grassland region.

A strong follow-up would therefore examine operating evidence: the conditions tested, the consistency of outputs, the uses actually achieved and the remaining constraints. That would allow another region to assess what might transfer and what would have to change. Such evidence is more valuable to a board considering the relevance of the bioeconomy than a collection of optimistic project descriptions.

For association boards: the biological profession can connect resource knowledge with processing, product evaluation and ecological assessment. Demonstration sites make those connections visible and give a concrete setting in which to describe the work.

Grant demand is not a market forecast

CBE JU reported 272 proposals to its 2026 call, requesting €1.65 billion against €170.7 million available. Within the topic distribution, proposals concerning residual biomass requested €214.6 million against a €14 million budget; separation and purification attracted requests of €100.5 million against €6.5 million. These are submitted proposals, prior to final evaluation and awards. N27

The figures establish demand for programme funding. They do not establish demand from customers for the eventual products. They also cannot be turned directly into an applicant's probability of success: projects differ in size, quality and eligibility, and the topic allocations matter.

For an association supporting researchers or companies, this distinction is practical. A crowded programme means that a development idea needs more than broad alignment with the policy theme. It needs a defensible account of the problem, the contribution of each partner and what the proposed work will establish.

The topic distribution also draws attention to less visible parts of biological manufacturing. A public story often begins with an organism, enzyme or product. Separation and purification concern the work needed to obtain a usable output from a complex process stream. These stages belong in the account of industrial

biology because they can determine whether a biological result becomes a product with a consistent specification.

The relevant professional lesson is to describe the whole decision sequence. Which uncertainty is biological? Which concerns engineering or material properties? Which requires evidence from potential users? A consortium becomes more intelligible when the partners' contributions are related to those uncertainties rather than presented as a list of institutional reputations.

Associations can support members by explaining the kinds of evidence required at different stages. A feasibility result, a pilot demonstration and an industrial application have different purposes. A claim that is sufficient for an exploratory study may be inadequate for a larger investment decision.

They can also make continuity visible. A funded project has a defined period, while a facility, data resource or professional capability may be needed after that period ends. That makes post-project access, maintenance and ownership relevant questions from the start. It does not mean that every proposal must promise indefinite operation; it means that the boundary of the funded work should be clear.

A useful European newsletter can follow programmes beyond their deadlines. It can connect the original topic with the projects eventually selected and, later, the results that become available. That preserves the distinction between policy intention, funded activity and demonstrated outcome.

For boards, this is a stronger service than announcing every open call. It helps members understand which opportunities fit their work and what a credible contribution would involve. The call in this retrospective issue has closed; the topic analysis remains useful for understanding the sector.

> **Also in this quarter**
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> - **Funding pipeline:** CBE JU's 23 September submission report records the proposals received. These are applications, not funded or commercially successful projects. N27

Policy and reports

The next challenge is to make a plan measurable

September marked the submission stage for draft national restoration plans. The Commission's account explains that the drafts enter an assessment process, while Austria's Environment Agency reports a national submission and consultation step. These are planning and procedural developments, not evidence that restoration targets have already been achieved. N15 · N16

The transition from a policy objective to a measurable programme has several parts. A plan needs an account of the starting condition, the change it seeks and the observations through which that change will be assessed. It also needs to explain how management decisions will respond when observations differ from expectations.

Those are professional questions for ecologists and other biologists. Choosing an indicator is not simply selecting something that can be counted. The indicator has to be related to the ecological process or condition about which a decision is being made. A convenient measurement can be repeatable while still answering the wrong question.

An explicitly hypothetical river project illustrates the distinction. A record of work completed could show that a physical intervention was delivered. A record of habitat condition could show a change in the intended environment. A biological observation could show how selected organisms responded. Each may be useful, but none should silently stand for all of the others.

Time matters as well. A short observation period can show an immediate response without establishing persistence. Conversely, a slow biological response does not necessarily mean that every part of an intervention has failed. The programme needs a reasoned expectation about the timescale and a way to distinguish monitoring from a premature final judgement.

This is where continuity becomes an institutional issue. A restoration project may change contractor or funding source while the ecological question remains. The ability to compare observations depends on preserving methods, locations, contextual data and the explanation of changes. Professional standards and well-described records can help maintain that continuity.

National associations can make a useful contribution by examining how biological work is specified in implementation. Are the ecological questions clear? Is there a role for methodological judgement? Are the staff and resources sufficient to produce the required observations? These questions can be asked without claiming that an association has evaluated a country's entire restoration plan.

A European comparison is particularly valuable when it compares similar functions rather than only national targets. Two countries may organise the work differently while still needing comparable capacities for habitat assessment, data management and evaluation. The first useful comparison may be how those capacities are maintained, not which country has used the strongest language in its strategy.

The same reasoning affects businesses. Restoration can create work in assessment, implementation and monitoring, but a European target alone does not establish the size or timing of that market. A reliable account needs the actual programme, commissioning arrangements and evidence requirements. Associations can help members understand those conditions while retaining the distinction between a policy ambition and a contracted task.

For association boards: restoration policy is also a question about the quality and continuity of biological work. The profession has something specific to contribute when it explains how evidence should support decisions over time.

European strategy moves the user closer to the centre

On 8 September, the Commission adopted a strategic approach combining AgRI 2040, concerned with agriculture, forestry and rural areas, and Food 2040, concerned with food systems including fisheries and aquaculture. Its announcement stresses the route from research to deployment and uptake, with users, researchers and businesses involved in testing solutions. The document sets a strategic direction without settling the next budget negotiations. C07

The important analytical point is what counts as a useful result. An innovation may be scientifically convincing while difficult to use in the intended setting. A user may face a seasonal constraint, an incompatible process or a requirement that was absent from the original experiment. Those conditions belong in the research question if the project aims at application.

This has implications for how biological expertise is organised. A specialist may understand the proposed mechanism, while another understands the operating environment or the biological system into which it will be introduced. Bringing users into a project does not remove the need for specialist judgement; it can make the judgement more relevant.

For a professional association, the opportunity is to connect scientific and practical descriptions of the same problem. A farmer, food producer and laboratory researcher may use different language for a shared constraint. A well-developed case study can identify the decision each needs to make and the evidence that would help.

Food and health bring a further distinction between product properties and outcomes. A composition can be measured, while its significance depends on use and context. A production innovation may improve one property without resolving every question about diet, affordability or environmental consequences. The European strategy's breadth makes those connections relevant, but it does not establish the effect of a particular product.

This is a useful setting for a biology association precisely because it spans professional communities. The contribution should be a concrete synthesis, preserving differences in evidence rather than collapsing them into the broad category of innovation.

Restoration and biorefining need different evidence

Austria’s draft plan

Baseline and repeat observations at defined sites

Comparable measures over time and a record of land management.

Irish farm demonstration

Performance across harvests and product streams

Feedstock variation, destination and quality for each fraction.

CBE JU call

Applications within a defined funding programme

Award decisions and project results are separate stages.

Austria’s September submission marks a planning step. The Irish report describes the opening of infrastructure. The EU funding figures describe applications. These are three different forms of progress. When writing about a project, pair the date with its stage and the kind of evidence that would support the next claim. This makes it possible for another association to compare a plan or demonstration with the conditions its own members work in.

Also in this quarter

- **Regional · Germany:** the NRW consultation ran into Q3 and closed on 16 August; subsequent implementation needs separate evidence. L15
- **National · Austria:** the Environment Agency's restoration-plan account supplies a concrete national procedural example, subject to the historical webpage limitation recorded in N16.
- **National · Netherlands:** COGEM's 22 July signal raises a regulatory-definition question. N17
- **EU:** the Commission's 1 September account describes the draft restoration-plan stage. N15

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