



ABIM 2017: The biggest gathering of biocontrol professionals – ever.

David Loughlin*

The Annual Biocontrol Industry Meeting (ABIM) held a record gathering of the biocontrol industry in Switzerland. The 12th ABIM conference, which took place 23 - 25 October at the Congress Center in Basel, attracted almost 1050 delegates (a 16% increase on 2016) from over 500 companies and 52 different countries. ABIM is the premier meeting for the biocontrol industry and is internationally recognised as the global platform for the industry to network, discover and unveil new products, market opportunities and research areas. This is a sector which is undergoing rapid growth and has been for several years.

IBMA President, Willem Ravensberg, said: “The Annual Biocontrol Industry Meeting (ABIM) 2017 was such a well-attended gathering of the sector that we can say with confidence - there have rarely been so many people committed to biological pest management assembled under one roof.”

This year’s record number of visitors, since the conference was founded twelve years ago, reflects the spirit of optimism and the growth of the industry in biological crop protection.

David said, “We are constantly encouraged by the growth in visitor numbers and this reflects the Steering Committee’s continuing commitment to promoting a unique event, showcasing innovation, excellence and professionalism in the industry.”



ABIM 2017 had several companies celebrating important anniversaries in 2017/2018. This year sees two companies celebrate 30 years of business. Belgium enterprise Biobest first entered the macrobiologicals market in 1988 while next year will be the turn of Andermatt Biocontrol of Switzerland to hit the same pearl milestone. This year however, Koppert took centre stage, with a golden 50 years since the family cucumber grower - turned augmentative biological pest management pioneer. In Monday evening’s keynote address, Koppert’s Managing Director, Paul Koppert (left) recounted the early days and formation of Koppert Biological System. Paul’s presentation included a specially commissioned video demonstrating the history and philosophy of the company both at home and overseas. Those who watched the video, Paul said, would see that core to the success of the company was its focus on people. At the end of his presentation, Paul Koppert personally presented Willem Ravensberg (right), as President of IBMA, with the revised edition of their book ‘Knowing & Recognizing’ which was also launched at ABIM.



In the second keynote address on Tuesday night, CABI Executive Director for Global Operations, Dr Ulrich Kuhlmann, called for more collaboration between the public and private sectors to encourage the use of biological controls by smallholder farmers to tackle damaging pests. While the number of biological control agents and products available to farmers is greater than ever, the use of these products, in comparison to other control methods such as pesticides, is still very low and one of the steps required for the use of biological control agents by farmers, is their recommendation by extension services. To demonstrate and assist him in his presentation, Dr Kuhlmann was ably supported by Henry Msatilo, Chief Agricultural Extension Officer, Malawi (Right) and Alex Semakula, Agricultural Extension Officer, Uganda (left), here seen with David Cary and Lucius Tamm.

On Tuesday morning, Patrizia Pitton of DG Sante gave two presentations. The first provided an update on REFIT of 1107/2009, the roadmap for which was published in November 2016. Despite pressure from IBMA to create a fast track approval system for low-risk actives and products no further action has yet been taken by the Commission. DG Sante continually refer to the REFIT procedure. For up-to-date information visit the DG SANTE website https://ec.europa.eu/food/plant/pesticides_en. So it seems no-one should be holding their breath for any dramatic changes to the speed at which biocontrol products make it through to market. The second presentation looked at the achievements of the EU expert group for sustainable plant protection. There have been many new applications for biopesticides since 1996. In the period 2011-2017 they represented half of the 57 new active substances. The implementation plan is available at <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-10041-2016-ADD-1/en/pdf>.

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Shakir al Zaidi and Nayem Hassan, Russell IPM, UK.



Wandering among the 69 international exhibitors, participants of ABIM could inform themselves about the latest product innovations and services that would help shape the future direction of the industry.

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Whilst Monday was dominated by professional working group meetings and an opportunity to spend time in the exhibition, Tuesday and Wednesday were given over to 35 diverse presentations from across the industry. Each working group had an opportunity during the 3-day programme to present their segment's latest developments.

Tuesday's sessions started with the all-important examination of the regulatory conditions affecting the speed of development in the market and this year ABIM was pleased to host contributions from three influencing organisations, with presentations from DG Sante, FAO and OECD Expert Group on Biopesticides.

ABIM would not be ABIM without a good panel discussion. On Wednesday, morning the topic was 'Innovations influencing implementation of biocontrol', with contributions from Hubertus Paetow (DLG), Marc Trapman, Vittorio Veronelli (CBC Europe), Antoine Bonhomme (Bioline AgroSciences), Ingeborg Klingen (NIBIO). The speakers were also joined by Willem Ravensberg, IBMA and Jean-Philippe Azoulay, ECPA.

For those thinking about ABIM 2018, the Steering Committee is already focused on how to make the next ABIM bigger and better. Everyone is welcome. Put the date in your diary for 22-24th October 2018 and we look forward to seeing you there.



In the natural and biochemical part of the programme, Tim Johnson, VP Field Development and Technical Services at Marrone Bio Innovations gave an update on Grandevo registration in EU. After many years of availability elsewhere the product is finally crossing the water.



In July, the IMCO committee of the European Parliament voted to support innovation and promote a single market for biostimulants and asked for better definition of biostimulants and clarification of the boundary with plant protection products and identified a need to develop safety criteria and harmonized standards, in particular for micro-organisms. As part of Tuesday afternoons session. In a unique position for a biocontrol conference, but perhaps reflecting the breadth of interest within the IBMA membership in biostimulants, Kristen Sukala, Senior Consultant to EBIC updated delegates on the task of bringing biostimulants to the European market and working to create new regulations.



Krista Coleman of Rutgers University, Princeton, New Jersey explained how the IR-4 (Interregional Research Project No.4) supports US growers by making pest control products available for use on specialty crops. Since 1963, it has been the major resource for supplying pest management tools by developing research data to support new EPA registrations, filling the void where Registrants don't see an economic interest. <http://ir4.rutgers.edu/biopesticides.html>



In addition to individual presentations, Wednesday morning was given over to a panel discussion looking at 'Innovations Influencing Implementation of Biocontrol.' The panel comprised Hubertus Paetow (DLG) (speaking), Marc Trapman (RIMpro), Vittorio Veronelli (CBC Europe), Antoine Bonhomme (Bioline AgroSciences), Ingeborg Klingen (NIBIO): Smart Crop Project, Willem Ravensberg, IBMA and Jean-Philippe Azoulay, ECPA.



In closing the conference and announcing next year's dates, David Cary, IBMA Executive Director said "We are constantly encouraged by the growth in visitor numbers this is a reflection of the Steering Committee's continuing commitment to promoting a unique event showcasing innovation, excellence and professionalism in the industry."



Bernard Blum Award

Owen Jones again chaired the judging panel for the Bernard Blum Award for novel biocontrol solutions that will make an impact on this rapidly growing market. The winner was CBC Europe for the product TREMOS, a digital electronic system used to disrupt location and mating of leafhopper species.

The other four shortlisted entries were:

- Certis USA for the product LifeGard, a systemic acquired resistance product based upon *Bacillus mycoides* isolate J with efficacy against range of diseases in potatoes, sugarbeets, tomatoes, vines, and other crops.
- Dow AgroSciences for the product Inatreq, a microbial produced by *Streptomyces* species with activity against *Septoria tritici* and *Puccinia* species in wheat.
- Koppert Biological Systems for the product Ulti-Mite Swirski, a biocontrol system that delivers predatory mites in an industrial compostable foil sachet that creates better protection against adverse climatic conditions, therefore extending the length of control possible.
- Marrone Bio Innovations for the product Majestene, a bionematicide based on *Burkholderia* spp. Strain A396 providing control of nematodes in a wide range of crops.

Vittorio Veronelli (top) of CBC Europe uniquely displays the award for this year's Bernard Blum Award. It was given for the company's new product Tremos, a digital electronic system used to disrupt location and mating of leafhopper species by generation of a disturbance noise as demonstrated by Vincenzo Cavicchi (right) Marketing & Agro Products Manager, on their stand. Although more physical than biological, the approach clearly shows an understanding of insect behaviour and using a novel approach to achieve control and was unanimously selected by the judging panel as this year's winner.



■ Visit www.abim.ch for more information. All presentations for this and previous ABIM events are available to registered delegates on the ABIM website.

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