

EBIC Code of Conduct for Placing Plant Biostimulants on the Market

The Context

Plant biostimulants do not sit easily in the conventional thinking about crop production. Until now, substance-based classifications separated products into the realm of fertilizers or plant protection products. Today, we realize that a single substance may have more than one functional use, bringing varied benefits depending on when and how it is applied as well as the context in which it is used.¹

In recent years, agronomists have come to realize that various physiological systems in plants (and with their microbiomes) are connected in complex and previously unsuspected ways. These interactions are where plant biostimulants have their effect.

This has led to some confusion in the marketplace about the nature and impact of plant biostimulants, further compounded by the variation between national definitions and approaches to regulating plant biostimulants. **This code of conduct embodies the commitment of EBIC's members to place plant biostimulants on the market in a way that promotes transparency and allows farmers to make informed choices about the additional benefits that biostimulants can bring to their crop management systems.**

Our Commitment

The members of the European Biostimulant Industry Council (EBIC) hereby commit that:

- ✓ Our production, distribution and commercialization of biostimulants respect all applicable regulations and laws currently in force, and we will immediately correct any deviations from this principle.
- ✓ We will not make any off-label claims for the benefits of our products; in particular, we will not claim any direct plant protection effects that have not been authorized according to the regulations in effect.
- ✓ We have compelling scientific evidence to justify any agronomic claims we make for our products.²
- ✓ We will make sufficient information about the scientific evidence available to the public in order to enable informed decisions about purchasing and use and, if requested, we will provide authorities with access to the full data from our research, subject to data protection and confidentiality provisions.
- ✓ The commitment in this Code of Conduct will be further strengthened through the following measures, among others:

¹ Such interactions are made explicit in the description of Integrated Pest Management annexed to the EU Directive on the Sustainable Use of Pesticides (2009/128/EC), which includes crop rotation, cultivation techniques, selection of cultivars and planting material, balanced fertilization and irrigation/drainage as methods for supporting the prevention and suppression of harmful organisms.

² This evidence may consist of literature from reputable scientific sources or bespoke research conducted by or on behalf of the producer, in line with established good practices for experimentation and any guidelines developed by EBIC for justifying claims.

- The Code will be reviewed regularly and updated as necessary to take into account relevant regulatory, scientific, technical and other developments;
- Guidelines will be issued on various technical and operational points to help companies implement their commitment successfully, including guidelines on how to support product claims and how to communicate product claims;
- In due time, a quality mark may be developed to help eligible biostimulant producers communicate their respect the terms of this commitment to stakeholders.

How We Implement Our Commitment

- ✓ Each EBIC member will confirm its commitment to this Code of Conduct in writing, with records maintained by the EBIC secretariat.
- ✓ Within three months of committing to the Code of Conduct (one of the conditions of joining EBIC), every EBIC member will devise a plan to ensure internal compliance and submit it to the EBIC secretariat. Members will not be allowed to renew their membership for the following year if they have failed to submit their compliance plans. (Companies joining EBIC less than three months before the end of the membership year can renew before the plan is submitted, but will not be permitted to renew for any subsequent years if the condition has not been met.)
- ✓ Compliance plans may include the following measures and/or any others deemed necessary by the member company:
 - (Re)training of relevant employees and partners to foster understanding of and commitment to the principles embodied in this Code of Conduct;
 - Review of labels, marketing prospectuses and other related documentation to ensure they respect the provisions of this Code of Conduct;
- ✓ The EBIC secretariat will maintain a dedicated webpage on the Code of Conduct where further details about implementation and related news will be documented: www.biostimulants.eu/ebic-code-of-conduct.
- ✓ Should a quality mark be developed, EBIC members may include it on their labels and marketing materials, where appropriate,³ to communicate their commitment to this Code of Conduct.

What happens if companies do not respect their commitments under this Code of Conduct?

- ✓ Reports of non-compliance with this Code of Conduct will be referred to EBIC's secretariat for consideration. If the complaint is considered to be grounded, it will be submitted to an independent review panel (composed of relevant stakeholders from outside EBIC's membership appointed by the EBIC board of directors)⁴ as needed for an opinion.

³ For example, subject to any local restrictions about the use of quality marks on packaging and labels.

⁴ For more details about the independent review panel, please see the webpage dedicated to the Code of Conduct listed in this document.

- ✓ On the basis of the independent panel's opinion, the EBIC board will establish a dialogue with the company in question in order to seek an amicable solution within a reasonable time frame.
- ✓ The ultimate sanction for continued non-compliance is expulsion from EBIC in accordance with the process outlined in the EBIC statutes.
- ✓ Expulsion would also result in a requirement for the producer (at its own expense) to withdraw all references to being party to the Code of Conduct (including a possible quality mark) from all of the company's communication and marketing materials.
- ✓ A brief factual statement on any relevant EBIC websites would announce that the expelled company is no longer considered a signatory to the Code of Conduct due to unresolved non-compliance.