



Launch of Life-Aquemfree project and signing of partnership agreement

Last September 29th, was held at the Murcia Institute of Agri-food Research and Development (IMIDA), the launch meeting of the new European project LIFE, called "Life-Aquemfree" and the signing of the agreement among the different partners. The opening ceremony and signature were attended by: Mr Adrian Martínez Cutillas (Director of IMIDA), Mr Juan Antonio García Fernández (Vice President for Research at the University of Murcia), Mr Antonio Sanz de la Morena (Manager of the Federation of Agricultural Cooperatives of Murcia) and Mr Lucas Galera Quiles (Head of R & D of Agricultural News).

Subsequently, a technical meeting with all researchers and technicians involved in this project which is led by the IMIDA was held. From that moment, began works and the actions planned for the development of this ambitious project, which aim is giving an economically and environmentally sustainable solution to the excess water from washing of equipment used in phytosanitary treatments and their packages produced on farms.

Source: <http://www.life-aquemfree.eu/lanzamiento-del-proyecto-life-aquemfree-y-firma-del-acuerdo-de-socios/>



Interview with Antonio Sanz

Manager. Federation of Agricultural Cooperatives of Murcia (FECOAM)

To begin, can you give us a brief overview or description of what is Fecoam?

The Federation of Agricultural Cooperatives of Murcia (Fecoam) was founded on August 29th of 1985 and currently group together 77 commercialisation agricultural associations throughout the region that, in turn, are associated with about 20,000 farmers and ranchers. His statutes are governed by the Regional Cooperatives Act, covering objectives and actions of representation, arbitration, information and advice, participation, training and promotion of agricultural cooperatives.

It is structured organically in 11 sectoral activities: flowers, supplies, nuts, ranching and feed, vegetables, oil, wine, citrus, apricot and green plum, peach and other fruit, and miscellaneous, in addition to the two subsectors of tomato and organic farming.

The upward trend of the organization since its inception has meant that over 90% of commercialisation associative organizations of Murcia are associated with it. Currently, it has a series of services, such as legal, agricultural, quality, environment, immigration, quality and environment, training, and joint occupational risk prevention. The staff is complete with four administrative assistants who are responsible for the secretarial work and accounting. In addition, as its strengths, it has an environmental and a quality department. The organization, throughout its history, has been always seeking for favouring the promotion of the cooperative sector and it has achieved its objectives through the thorough programming and implementation of its activities and actions, from which not only the cooperatives are benefited, but entire agricultural sector in the region.

What is the role Fecoam plays and what are the services it offers to its associated cooperatives?

The federation represents and defends the general interests of its associates and partners from public administrations, and from any other person or entity, and exercises, where appropriate, relevant legal activities. One of its main objectives is to promote cooperative promotion and training. It also serves conciliation in conflicts between cooperative societies or between them and their partners, and organizes counseling services, auditing, legal or technical assistance.

The organization acts as an interlocutor and representative at the public authorities and institutions, and participates in social services related to the development of reception actions and the integration of immigrants, as well as the educational support activities in this area. In the same way, it provides advisory services to farmers in all matters related to their farms and promotes initiatives to contribute to sustainable rural development, environmental conservation, rural innovation and production organization to contribute to improve quality of life.

Does Fecoam have vocation to participate in projects involving the development of new products, processes or technologies? What other projects or collaborations are you immersed in?

Fecoam has thrown itself fully into development issues of research and innovation to add value to the regional production system and provide a differential value over other producer countries. The organization is currently involved in three projects with funding from Brussels: 'Life-Aquemfree', 'EuroPHA' and 'Carbgrowth'. The first is a Life+ project that has the challenge of developing a new system of solar photocatalysis for decontaminating water from the washing of containers and phytosanitary treatments equipment, so that the water is treated and suitable for other agricultural uses. EuroPHA seeks to develop a bioplastic for food packaging that is economically viable and environmentally friendly. This new product is 100% biodegradable and from plant origin, so it is a real alternative to conventional plastics based on petroleum products. Finally, the main objective of Carbgrowth, in which also participate the IMIDA and Murcia Association of Agricultural Producers (Amopa), is to provide the greenhouses a higher technological level to significantly reduce the production costs for farmers, while the yield and quality of products increases, with the particularity that the waste generated by the fish and the positive effects of carbon dioxide on plants are used.

Regarding the Life + 'Aquemfree' project, how came up with the idea of your participation?

We are aware of technological progress in the sector and changes in consumer demand. Therefore, we have been developing training and technology transfer in collaboration with the Regional Ministry of Agriculture and Water, by testing fields located in different parts of the Region, where new tests are performed and confirmed researches are used to transfer them to farmers in those areas, in addition to performing other R&D programs directly, or in collaboration with researchers from the sector. Our collaboration in the project comes from the foregoing and the ease with which the federation reaches their partners, farmers, who are the potential end users in the region of the technology developed in this project.

What is the Fecoam interest in this project? Do you think its objective is interesting for agriculture in Murcia, and in particular, for cooperatives?

As I mentioned, the federation is committed to innovation. Additionally, our partners, the cooperatives, research and develop new products in order to offer a wide range, using environmental friendly means of production. With the technology that will be developed in this project we will achieve to degrade, in a sustainable form, pesticide residues on waste water of the farms. Besides, the idea is that you can use water already treated for different uses, such as irrigation, which is especially interesting in Murcia, by the scarcity of water resources. The results will be known at first by our partners, giving them a differential value over others, and an added value to the regional production system.

What project actions do you collaborate in, and which of them have more prominence?

Fecoam participates in the preparatory actions, carrying out an 'ex ante' study as a diagnosis of environmental problems, both qualitative and quantitative about pesticide residues. This analysis will provide indicators of the situation before developing the project, which can be compared with the situation once it is completed. In addition, leveraging its long experience and strategic positioning between farmers and cooperatives, the organization also participates in actions of dissemination, as it represents the majority of potential end users, to ensure the selection of representative pilot farms, partners training and ensure a broad dissemination of results.

What are the results you wish to obtain in the development of the new technology?

The main challenge is that the new system of solar photocatalysis is able to decontaminate completely the water from the washing of containers and phytosanitary treatments equipment, to give value to an agro-waste and use it in other agricultural uses. The project involves the development of a first prototype, the tuning of the system and the technique, for its implantation in the five pilot farms we will select. Over four years, will be assessed and analyzed the results in these fields, in order to achieve a design in line with the intended objectives. It means it will be feasible, both technically and financially for a large number of farms, and that it can be commercialized. The challenge is to turn everything into a product that is useful.

News of interest

- I Meeting Cienciainnova "Public-private partnership".

January 27th. 9:00 – 14:00

Salvador García Library - Molina de Segura (Murcia)

<http://cienciainnova.molinadesegura.es/>

- 9th International course "Post-harvest technology and minimum processed".

5 - 11 of March.

UPCT-Cartagena (Murcia)

www.upct.es/gpostref

- FAME Innova 2015 "Fair of Agricultural Technology and Mediterranean Agribusiness. International Forum of Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation".

13-16 of May.

IFEPA – Torre Pacheco (Murcia).

www.ifepa.es

- Events related to the LIFE program.

<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/news/events/index.htm>

- Events related to the Horizonte 2020 program.

<http://eshorizonte2020.es/actualidad/eventos>

- Events related to the EIP of agriculture.

<https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/en/content/european-calendar>

*** Further information and contact:**

<http://www.life-aquemfree.eu/>



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