Press Release

Vienna, 27 June 2022

MICROBIOMES CAN MAKE OUR FOOD SYSTEM MORE SUSTAINABLE

AIT coordinates EU project MicrobiomeSupport in Brussels

Four years ago, the first stakeholder event of the MicrobiomeSupport project coordinated by Angela Sessitsch, Head of Competence Unit Bioresources of the AIT Center for Health and Bioresources, took place in Vienna. Since then, the EU-funded project has been working intensively on coordinating, structuring and advancing international research and innovation in the field of microbiomes - with the overarching goal of ensuring a long-term sustainable food and feed value chain. To this end, more than 150 stakeholders from academia, industry and government will gather for a final conference in Brussels between June 27 and 29, 2022, to highlight the economic, health and environmental aspects of microbiomes.

Microbiomes, the community of microorganisms, are everywhere and have a critical impact on the health of plants, animals, humans and the overall environment. Dr. Angela Sessitsch, head of the Competence Unit Bioresources of the Center for Health and Bioresources at the AIT Austrian Institute of Technology and coordinator of the project, is convinced: "Microbiomes have the potential to improve sustainable production of food, feed and biofuels. Microbiome applications could support the development of a mature bioeconomy and the achievement of climate change goals." Last year, in 2021, Sessitsch, along with Tanja Kostic, also from the Bioresources Competence Unit, and eight international partners* published a recommendation in Nature Microbiology titled "Microbiome innovations for a sustainable future." that explains how to harness the potential of microbiomes on the path to a sustainable future.

In recent years, knowledge and interest in microbiomes has increased rapidly, but they are still rarely used in everyday life to improve food production and human and animal health. Problems here include uncoordinated research methods, regulatory hurdles that hinder the commercialization of microbial products, and insufficient funding for microbiome research. Sessitsch stressed the importance of considering the functions of the microbiome in policymaking, an area in which the project has been engaged for the past four years, she continues:
"Microbiomes, which live all around us, play a critical role in the transition to sustainable and circular food systems. With innovative microbiome applications, we can create sustainable and high-quality alternatives to conventional approaches to health and food management. In this way, we reduce the impact on soil, water and also greenhouse gas emissions."

Food security in times of global food crisis

Recent events such as climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic and the war between Russia and Ukraine have highlighted the vulnerability and complexity of our food system. The recently released Global Food Crisis Report has revealed an "alarming deterioration in acute food security," and experts* are warning of a global food crisis brewing like an ominous storm on the horizon. For many nations, including European countries, facing food shortages, reduced energy supplies and rising food prices, ensuring long-term food security and self-sufficiency has become a top policy priority. Microbial-based applications offer innovative solutions that can help achieve these goals and increase the resilience of global food systems. However, bridging the gap between today's potential and tomorrow's microbiome solutions will require overcoming regulatory hurdles and increasing research and international collaboration.

MicrobiomeSupport Stakeholder Conference - June 27-29.

The high-profile conference, June 27-29, 2022, in Brussels, will feature presentations by experts* from academia and project partner organizations, representatives from the European Commission and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and a panel discussion on how microbiomes can be used to address current policy challenges in practice. Participants* will have the opportunity to learn about project highlights, the latest in microbiome research for human, animal and environmental health, and new approaches to microbiome policy and innovation strategies.

The conference welcomes renowned speakers such as John Bell, Director Healthy Planet, DG Research and Innovation of the European Commission, and Karel Callens, Senior Advisor to the Chief Economist, Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN.

All information about the conference and the possibility to register for free can be found at:
https://www.microbiomesupport.eu/
For more information on the AIT Competence Unit Bioresources, please visit:
https://www.ait.ac.at/themen/bioresources

About MicrobiomeSupport

MicrobiomeSupport, led by the AIT Austrian Institute of Technology, is a project funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program that aims to foster the creation of a sustainable and circular microbiome-based bioeconomy. The Action is a close collaboration of 36 academic and government partners from 13 EU countries and 7 international partners from non-EU countries who have worked together to set quality standards for microbiome research worldwide and align research funding globally to avoid duplication. In addition, the project is currently developing recommendations for a strategic research and innovation agenda in Europe and around the world, addressing key policy challenges that can lead to innovative applications in the promising field of the microbiome.

Press Contact:
Daniel Pepl, MAS MBA
Corporate and Marketing Communications
AIT Austrian Institute of Technology
T +43 (0)50550-4040
daniel.pepl@ait.ac.at I www.ait.ac.at

Fabian Purtscher
AIT Austrian Institute of Technology GmbH
Center for Health & Bioresources
Marketing and Communication
T +43(0) 50550-4406 | M +43(0) 664 8251322
fabian.purtscher@ait.ac.at | http://www.ait.ac.at