

Ms. Sylvia Plak, President, IBMA

Congratulations on your election as the new president of IBMA. Would you share with 2BMonthly readers a little background and how you came to this point in your career?

Thank you very much for your interest and opportunity provided to get closer to the biocontrol and biostimulants community. As an engineer in agronomy, science is my backbone and innovation is such a great field of interest. I have spent all my career in development and regulatory affairs, starting at national level, and growing in responsibility at regional, European and global level. I joined Sumitomo Chemical Agro Europe 10 years ago and was in charge of both conventional and biocontrol product ranges. As a director, I am also part of the management committee and act for the future of Sumitomo in Europe, Middle East and Africa (EMEA). Biocontrol products have grown, to now represent 50 per cent of our turnover, and playing an active role in IBMA was perceived as important by the headquarters and my management. They proposed I apply for this presidential position, which I have accepted.

Can you share with us some objectives you have for IBMA?

Behind the organization of IBMA at EU and global levels and ABIM in collaboration with Fibl, there are a lot of activities at the national level, at the professional group level, with partners, with authorities and politicians. These are not sufficiently recognized and owned by our members. I would like these to be more visible, transparent and linked together. From a business point of view, I aim to pursue the work initiated by my predecessor and IBMA team on low risk substances and products. A quicker access to the market would be a benefit not only to the industry, but also in providing sustainable solutions to the farmers.

IBMA has seen tremendous growth since its founding. Do you believe continued membership growth is essential, or do you have other objectives in mind for the association?

Growing is certainly powerful. It provides you more weight in negotiations. But, more importantly, we need to demonstrate benefit to our members by ensuring their growth.

Biocontrol conferences continue to arise from a number of organizers, both in Europe and elsewhere. Do you believe it is critical for IBMA to maintain your biocontrol conference leadership position for your members and the biocontrol industry?

Of course, we are the closest to the full lifecycle of our business. It is also a great opportunity to get the biocontrol community together. IBMA has pursued a strategy of taking a lead alongside Fibl in ABIM which is emphatically the networking event of the biocontrol industry. We backed this event with participation in regional events alongside New Ag International and local BPG member associations. This has been successful and receives my support.

IBMA and EBIC discussions about a closer partnership have resulted in formation of several inter-member task forces. What areas of agreement and differences did these discussions reveal? Do you believe closer collaboration between the two organizations will become a reality in 2019?

We have some subjects in common and of course many members in common. We have not set up any inter-member task forces as yet. Our two associations will continue to talk at president and board level with our

treasurer Karine Grosbeau taking a lead from our side. The two associations will co-operate on common issues at the secretariat level and we will maintain a watch on the development of regulation focusing on boundaries with biocontrol and where the new legislation causes a re-drafting of text in PPP regulation. We have a lot in common, but each organization has priority focus areas that need attention now and hence the timing was questioned by many. The structure of the two organizations is different in many ways as well. However, we look forward working together on common topics in the future.

Global regulatory harmonization is a topic discussed at many biocontrol conferences globally, but it continues to be an elusive goal for the industry. Why do you believe that is true? What initiatives do you foresee from IBMA that can move us closer to this objective?

It may be simply displayed by two questions. Do you want change? And do you want to change? A general recognition of a need to change is occurring. IBMA activities for more pragmatic regulation in Europe are a big part of this, especially our white paper. IBMA and BPG have pushed this at the international level. We see pragmatic guidance at FAO, seminars and discussions at OECD and an engagement with many stakeholders already with much more to come. We all need to work together to make the change happen.

At the ABIM meeting in October, IBMA released a white paper proposing a new regulation for bioprotectants in the EU. What has been the reaction from EU institutions to this proposal and lobbying efforts conducted by IBMA to date?

IBMA has received strong support within the European Parliament and Council and Member States. The European Commission and EFSA have shown interest but want more detail and question whether the timing is good. We will continue to engage support, communicate our ideas and of course be happy to work with any and all parties to formulate details. You will hear a lot about the white paper and associated activities throughout the year.

In 2019, 2BMonthly and New Ag International will be organizing two biocontrol conferences in conjunction with IBMA – BioControl LatAm in August 2019 in Brazil, and BioControl Asia in September 2019 in China. Do you see events like these as key to fostering development of biocontrol technologies in emerging markets?

As I mentioned earlier, IBMA sees the regional events in various locations as important for developing and using biocontrol technologies on a global basis. We have participated in Biocontrol LatAm and Biocontrol Asia events and see development of these markets as key to the success and uptake of biocontrol and sustainable agriculture in key emerging markets. We will continue to participate and support the events with enthusiasm.

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