Brussels, 7th February 2012

Why the Bioeconomy matters

European Commission workshop outlines the Bioeconomy's impact in our lives

Stirring lessons in science and innovation were delivered in Brussels on Tuesday February 7 at a European Commission workshop devoted to the Bioeconomy.

Some 55 people - including researchers, officials and journalists from each of the EU's 27 member states - took part in the workshop, which aimed at improving the understanding of the Bioeconomy. The event, entitled 'Communicating the Bioeconomy', also aimed to build bridges between the scientific community, EU funded research and the media.

The participants heard how the Bioeconomy, an emerging, complex concept, embraces a vast economic and social scope, from food to fishing, industry to biology, and research to health and wellbeing. It is worth €2 trillion annually in Europe, and provides around 22 million jobs.

"The Bioeconomy is based on biological, renewable, raw materials from agriculture, forestry and the oceans," said Maive Rute, Director for Food, Agriculture and Biotechnology in the Commission's Directorate-General for Research and Innovation. "We see the Bioeconomy as an opportunity. Europe and the world face great challenges like food shortages, climate change, and dwindling energy resources. The Bioeconomy is not a silver bullet, but it could offer solutions to these challenges."

The workshop came just one week ahead of the February 13 unveiling by EU Research and Innovation Commissioner Máire Geoghegan-Quinn of a strategy to promote the Bioeconomy so that it can spur growth and innovation in Europe while addressing the grand societal challenges of our time. The strategy, entitled 'Innovating for Sustainable Growth: A Bioeconomy for Europe', aims to foster smart, sustainable and inclusive growth across different technologies, policy areas and industries.

Christian Patermann from Germany's Bioeconomy Council admitted the Bioeconomy was a difficult concept to grasp, but insisted that it needed to be explained. "We face two communication challenges: first, the Bioeconomy is an enormously complex monster: and second, European audiences have a decreasing understanding of scientific complexities," he said. Patermann urged journalists to tell the story and educate audiences. "Science needs journalists! You have to have the courage to tell your editor that you need more space to tell the story," he said.

The workshop included presentations from two leading researchers.

British food scientist and biochemist Rachel Edwards-Stuart demonstrated how research is changing our understanding and appreciation of food. Edwards-Stuart, whose research has been sponsored by celebrity chef Heston Blumenthal, showed that it was now possible to measure flavour perceptions from the moment a food is seen, to its smell, taste, texture and even the sound it makes. "We now know more than ever before about how all the different messages combine in the brain to tell you whether you liked it and would eat it again," she said.

And Dr Hellmut Münch, from Germany's Medical Association for Enzyme Research (MEF), described how new enzyme products were changing treatments for rheumatism, diabetes, autoimmune diseases and cancer. "Everything we do is controlled by cellular and extra-cellular enzymes," he said. "Without enzymes, the Earth would be barren like the moon, a dead planet."

For more information on the Bioeconomy please visit: http://ec.europa.eu/research/bioeconomy/