President’s Address

Let me start with wishing you all a happy, healthy and prosperous new year. 2018 has just started and I am sure we face a new exciting year for biocontrol. Before I go into that I will have a quick look back at the highlights of 2017.

Looking back at 2017

Early February the European Parliament passed the Motion for Resolution on a fast track for biological low-risk plant protection products with a near unanimity over all political groups. That was a very encouraging step for which we had worked very hard together with PA Europe. In the course of the following months our disappointment grew since the EU Commission did not react positively to the resolution. A response of the COM to the EP was only published on August 31 rather surreptitiously and we only found this out via the Commissioner himself in a letter to me in December. I wrote Dr. Andriukaitis a letter in November asking him about progress with low-risk PPPs on a number of areas. The Commissioner provided quite some answers that indeed illustrate progress but regarding the topic of the Resolution he refers to the REFIT process and possible future improvements following REFIT. All the documents referred here can be found on the IBMA members only website on the low-risk page (http://www.ibma-global.org/en/low-risk).

IBMA submitted its response on the REFIT stakeholder consultation just before Christmas. I hope that many of our members did the same. A public consultation is still open to February 12th. I encourage all of you and other stakeholders to participate in that enquiry. Although 2017 started positively with the resolution, all our attempts to achieve broader support of it by letters, visits, etc. to many institutions, we seem to be caught up by REFIT, and we have to see how that develops. We continue of course building support for an adapted procedure on as many fronts as we can.

Fortunately, 2017 has produced positive results such as the establishment and publication of the low-risk criteria, the EPPO Standard on efficacy evaluation of low-risk PPPs.

New Year 2018

We participated in numerous meetings and our voice was heard in topics covering the Sustainable Use Directive, Access and Benefit Sharing, biopesticide expert meetings of the EU and the OECD, Minor Uses, and so on. We held a workshop on the Bacillus spp. in food issue and many activities followed, demonstrating the safety of Bt, although the book cannot be closed yet.

ABIM 2017 was very successful and we reached a milestone having over 1000 attendees. As the IBMA Board, we started conversations with EBIC about a closer collaboration and at the AGM in October the membership supported a further investigation on the details of a potential merger. We had a few changes in the composition of the Executive Committee with some new blood. Vittorio Veronelli left the board and EC after more than 10 years of commitment and was honoured by being conferred as an Honorary Member.
Looking ahead into 2018

When anticipating agricultural developments in this new year then the following keywords come to mind: sustainability, climate change, growing population, circular economy, organics. More technical words as precision ag, robotics, drones, internet of things, etc. can be added to the list. From a science point of view, we see innovations based on microbiome, CRISPR-cas, endophytes, RNAi, etc. popping up regularly. Our field of biocontrol touches on all these topics and trends and this provides leverage for our industry. The expectations are high as before, and I saw a marketing report foreseeing a growth of over 20% for biologicals in agriculture for the next 5 years. Another one predicting biopesticides to grow 16-17% annually leading to a turnover of US$ 11 billion by 2025. I am sure we will see a continuation in 2018 of mergers, acquisitions, partnerships, start-ups, investments etc. as in the last couple of years. Our biocontrol industry is very dynamic.

What is driving this? Well, we all know these factors relating to societal and political pressure, and to more technical issues like resistance in conventional products, an increasingly higher hurdle for chemicals, and a lack of new molecules. New solutions are needed and there is an abundance of new discoveries ongoing, particularly with microorganisms and new genetic techniques. Maybe we are in the middle of the most active and dynamic period on crop protection; history will tell. We see a similar movement in the biostimulant industry, maybe an even more dynamic activity. This is also illustrated by a new newsletter that saw the daylight just last week, the 3B E-Weekly newsletter from Agropages where the third B stands for biofertilizers. Biological inputs are clearly the new direction in agriculture that should help us providing food safety and food security in the near future. The increase of organic agriculture stimulates that as well.

Our industry is ready to accept that challenge and ready to achieve those sustainable goals. We could ask the question, “Are our regulators ready for a new era of approved products?” I am afraid not. More and more I hear that innovations in agriculture in Europe are blocked by the precautionary principle and strict legislation. I have heard politicians saying this as well as our farmers, and of course people in our industry itself. There is a paradox between desiring new solutions that are sustainable and innovative, progress is going very fast, but old and inflexible laws need to be made innovative as well. This is needed rather soon if we do not want to deter innovative developments away from Europe to other parts of the world where things are moving faster. Even the newest FAO guideline on registration of microbial, botanical and semiochemical pest control agents for plant protection and public health uses for FAO member countries is more flexible and appropriate than many others.

It is time for a change. Biopesticides should be regulated separately from conventional chemical pesticides. A new legislative framework is needed, maybe all biological inputs in agriculture should be addressed by such a new approach. Isn’t it about safety for human health and the environment, regardless the function of a product? IBMA is starting to investigate the options for a better system, but this may be the biggest challenge in the lifetime of our organisation. These are thoughts at the moment, but we are about to discuss this further within our association, to be continued!
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IBMA-EBIC collaboration

At the AGM in Basel I explained why both associations are talking to each other and are considering to merge. After the positive vote in both IBMA and EBIC this will be continued in 2018. We aim to provide members with all details of such a far-reaching development. A working group will start soon and you will be informed on the various steps by email and via our website. More info can be found at http://www.ibma-global.org/en/ibma-ebic-project-1.

Executive Committee

With the start of this new year we will see new faces in the ExCom. We have a new vice-president, Roma Gwynn (APS Biocontrol), a new head of the Professional Group Microbials, Matthias von Erffa (Bayer), also the Natural and Biochemicals Products PG has a new chair, Lara Ramaekers (Arysta), and we have two new National Group delegates representing the National Group Council, Alejandro Altube (Idebio, Spain) and Tillmann Frank (Enema, Germany/Austria). A warm welcome to these members and I wish you lots of success in your new role. This also means we have said goodbye to the following ExCom members in 2017 being Vittorio Veronelli, Andrew Brown, Charles Vaury, Antoine Meyer and Martin Andermatt. I want to thank you all for your commitment, time, and effort dedicated to IBMA in the past years. Without people like you we could not function. Your dedication to IBMA is highly appreciated and I thank you very much for that, I am sure on behalf of our membership.

Biocontrol Events

A number of BC meetings will take place in 2018. BioControls USA West 2018 is held March 5-9 in San Diego, USA; Biocontrol Africa in Nairobi, Kenya from March 19-20, Biocontrol Latam in November in Colombia. ABIM 2018 will be October 22-24 where you will see our new set up that is required because of the continuous growing of this event. On January 31 we will start with the 6th SUD Symposium in the European Parliament, see our website for more details and to register. IBMA will also be present at the new exhibition in Amsterdam in June called GreenTech and TOFF (The Organic Farmers Fair), again I refer to our website and newflashes. Beside the one listed here many other biocontrol conferences take place. Be sure to attend the ones that will bring you value. We are likely to see you at one or more of those.

Participation in IBMA activities

I would like to take the opportunity to wholeheartedly thank the numerous volunteers that worked hard in our association in the past year, in National Groups, in Professional Groups and in other functions and roles in IBMA. Of course, also my sincere thanks to our staff in the IBMA office. Without all of your commitment and dedication we could not do the job. IBMA enters its 23rd year of existence but it seems our efforts are more needed than ever, so also people to do those jobs. I therefore also call on our members to become active in any kind of activity we have.

Willem Ravensberg
Welcome all to what I hope will be a pivotal and great year for all those associated with the biocontrol industry.

In 2017 we saw a tremendous amount of support for sustainability and a bigger awareness from consumers and politicians as to how our food is grown, prepared, packaged and sold. In my own awareness this has only intensified in the early days of 2018. There is a growing dissatisfaction with the status quo and moves to better inform consumers of the food production and give them the ability to make a conscious choice on practices based on the effect they have on the environment and human health.

There are calls for investing in and promoting products and techniques that have less impact on the world in which we live. 2018 is indeed a year when the opportunity to show our industry is a key part of this green consciousness gives us wonderful opportunities.

A wrap up of key events and issues of 2017

REFIT: The REFIT stakeholder exercise as mentioned by Willem was completed in the last days of 2017 and we met our deadline to submit our industry’s views on how the EC Regulation 1107/2009 is not meeting the needs of our members and their innovative products. As he also said the opportunity for input is still there! IBMA are hopeful we will have an interview with the consultants to expand on why we believe the regulation is failing our members. You as consumers can still participate in the process until 12th February and small medium enterprises can participate by contacting the IBMA Secretariat.

Regulatory Highlights: The SC PAFF have been active in the area of endocrine disruptors and the scientific criteria of endocrine disruptors under various EU legislation can be found in UIF’s regulatory section of the website. The new OECD guidance document of semiochemicals can also be found there.

ABIM 2017: Willem mentioned we reached the magic 1000+ delegates meeting in Basel at ABIM in October – fantastic! We had tremendous support from our sponsors and the programme was assessed live by the audience with approval voting. It was endorsed as valuable to those attending. The exhibition hall was busy all the time and the meeting rooms in constant action throughout the event! Planning for an even bigger and better event for 2018 is now well under way, make sure you register early and get the earlybird discount available!

EU Sustainable Plant Protection Group: This initiative introduced by the Netherlands when they held the EU Presidency has left a legacy of the EU and Member States having two goals and 40 points on which to achieve IPM being the norm of EU agriculture and accelerating the bringing to the market of low-risk plant protection products, the majority of which are biological control products. Even after Rob van Drent left the EU COM in his role co-ordinating the implementation of these points we have been assured the work will continue. We as a concerned association will be constantly checking on progress in these areas with Patrizia Pitton who now has the big job of carrying forward the momentum established by Rob with support from 19 Member States.
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Issues continued

DG Sante Unit F and SUD: When I first heard that DG Sante were moving the responsibility of the Sustainable Uses Directive to Unit F in Grange, Ireland, I, like many others, was very sceptical. I do have to eat my words as it has resourced the directive with dedicated people under the leadership of Paola Colombo who are enthusiastic, committed and prepared to challenge Member States when they believe they have indeed not been going far enough in implementing this directive. We acknowledged this when I met with them. Please look at their reports in the regulatory section of our website and you can see a big difference as this directive, highly favourable to biocontrol, is now being implemented seriously – they have given it some teeth for which IBMA are grateful to this dedicated team.

SUD Symposium: In 2017 we tackled the wine industry where a lot of biocontrol tools are available. The major insect pests are well covered with mating disruption and biopesticides and during the growing season there is little need for traditional insecticides. In years of high pathogen infestation an IPM approach using biocontrol and chemical solutions combined with good grapevine husbandry works best. A number of biocontrol tools are available to use. Herbicide use can be combined with an increasing number of bioherbicides. There is a strong reliance on under-canopy grasses being maintained and a source of ecosystem services. This year our longstanding Chair Michael Hamell has challenged us to tackle arable crops. This represents an area where there is less product availability, larger acreages and a history of reliance on traditional control methods. I look forward to seeing progress in this area and a good debate in the EU Parliament on January 31.

IBMA Staffing: We had a number of issues to deal with in 2017 for IBMA staff. Louisa Püschel joined us to take on a lot of the administration work. Louisa has adapted well to the IBMA work and has reliably taken control of this area as the first point of contact. Isabelle left us from August to November to have her first baby Alessandro from whom she is very proud. She couldn’t keep away for the whole period and joined us for ABIM which was well received by IBMA members. During her time off we were fortunate to be able to engage Britta, her predecessor, to cover for her maternity leave. This was a much smoother operation than when maternity leave cover was needed previously. Ulf Heilig’s time allocated to IBMA activities has increased due to the complex issues we faced in 2017 and will face in 2018. He has done a good job alongside Isabelle of making his reports more useful and the information more accessible for members to use.

IBMA Members: Like Willem, I must reiterate that as an organisation we rely on the support and activities of our members as we have a small executive team only. The work by these volunteers is of high quality and impact and strongly appreciated and relied on by our executive team. This year we will need to elect officers to replace Willem as President and Ralf as Treasurer as from January 2019. They will not be easy shoes to fill as both have dedicated a lot of time and effort to our association with a big impact, but don’t feel shy, please step up to take on what I can assure you will be an extremely interesting and rewarding opportunity to make a difference to our industry and its impact on agriculture, the environment and society!

Welcome to 2018, an exciting year for biocontrol from me on behalf of our IBMA Executive Team!

David Cary

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