ABIM 2017: The biggest gathering of biocontrol professionals — ever.

David Loughlin*

The Annual Biocontrol Industry Meeting (ABIM) held a record gathering of the biocontrol industry in Switzerland. The 12th ABIM conference, which took place 23 - 25 October at the Congress Center in Basel, attracted almost 1050 delegates (a 16% increase on 2016) from over 500 companies and 52 different countries. ABIM is the premier meeting for the biocontrol industry and is internationally recognised as the global platform for the industry to network, discover and unveil new products, market opportunities and research areas. This is a sector which is undergoing rapid growth and has been for several years.

IBMA President, Willem Ravensberg, said: “The Annual Biocontrol Industry Meeting (ABIM) 2017 was such a well-attended gathering of the sector that we can say with confidence - there have rarely been so many people committed to biological pest management assembled under one roof.”

This year’s record number of visitors, since the conference was founded twelve years ago, reflects the spirit of optimism and the growth of the industry in biological crop protection.

David said, “We are constantly encouraged by the growth in visitor numbers and this reflects the Steering Committee’s continuing commitment to promoting a unique event, showcasing innovation, excellence and professionalism in the industry.”

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Shakir al Zaidi and Nayem Hassan, Russell IPM, UK.

In the second keynote address on Tuesday night, CABI Executive Director for Global Operations, Dr Ulrich Kuhlmann, called for more collaboration between the public and private sectors to encourage the use of biological controls by smallholder farmers to tackle damaging pests. While the number of biological control agents and products available to farmers is greater than ever, the use of these products, in comparison to other control methods such as pesticides, is still very low and one of the steps required for the use of biological control agents by farmers, is their recommendation by extension services. To demonstrate and assist him in his presentation, Dr Kuhlmann was ably supported by Henry Msatilomo, Chief Agricultural Extension Officer, Malawi (Right) and Alex Semakula, Agricultural Extension Officer, Uganda (left), here seen with David Cary and Lucius Tamm.

On Tuesday morning, Patrizia Pitton of DG Sante gave two presentations. The first provided an update on REFIT of 1107/2009, the roadmap for which was published in November 2016. Despite pressure from IBMA to create a fast track approval system for low-risk actives and products no further action has yet been taken by the Commission. DG Sante continually refer to the REFIT procedure. For up-to-date information visit the DG SANTE website: https://ec.europa.eu/food/plant/pesticides_en. So it seems no-one should be holding their breath for any dramatic changes to the speed at which biocontrol products make it through to market. The second presentation looked at the achievements of the EU expert group for sustainable plant protection. There have been many new applications for biopesticides since 1996. In the period 2011-2017 they represented half of the 57 new active substances. The implementation plan is available at http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-10041-2016-ADD-1/en/pdf.
Wandering among the 69 international exhibitors, participants of ABIM could inform themselves about the latest product innovations and services that would help shape the future direction of the industry.

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Whilst Monday was dominated by professional working group meetings and an opportunity to spend time in the exhibition, Tuesday and Wednesday were given over to 35 diverse presentations from across the industry. Each working group had an opportunity during the 3-day programme to present their segment’s latest developments.

Tuesday’s sessions started with the all-important examination of the regulatory conditions affecting the speed of development in the market and this year ABIM was pleased to host contributions from three influencing organisations, with presentations from DG Sante, FAO and OECD Expert Group on Biopesticides.

ABIM would not be ABIM without a good panel discussion. On Wednesday, morning the topic was ‘Innovations influencing implementation of biocontrol’, with contributions from Hubertus Paetow (DLG), Marc Trapman, Vittorio Veronelli (CBC Europe), Antoine Bonhomme (Bioline AgroSciences), Ingeborg Klingen (NIBIO). The speakers were also joined by Willem Ravensberg, IBMA and Jean-Philippe Azoulay, ECPA.

For those thinking about ABIM 2018, the Steering Committee is already focused on how to make the next ABIM bigger and better. Everyone is welcome. Put the date in your diary for 22-24th October 2018 and we look forward to seeing you there.
Bernard Blum Award

Owen Jones again chaired the judging panel for the Bernard Blum Award for novel biocontrol solutions that will make an impact on this rapidly growing market. The winner was CBC Europe for the product TREMOS, a digital electronic system used to disrupt location and mating of leafhopper species.

The other four shortlisted entries were:

- Certis USA for the product LifeGard, a systemic acquired resistance product based upon *Bacillus mycoides* isolate J with efficacy against range of diseases in potatoes, sugarbeets, tomatoes, vines, and other crops.
- Dow AgroSciences for the product Inatreq, a microbial produced by *Streptomyces* species with activity against *Septoria tritici* and *Puccinia* species in wheat.
- Koppert Biological Systems for the product Ulti-Mite Swirski, a biocontrol system that delivers predatory mites in an industrial compostable foil sachet that creates better protection against adverse climatic conditions, therefore extending the length of control possible.
- Marrone Bio Innovations for the product Majestene, a bionematicide based on *Burkholderia* spp. Strain A396 providing control of nematodes in a wide range of crops.

Biontico Veronelli (top) of CBC Europe uniquely displays the award for this year’s Bernard Blum Award. It was given for the company’s new product Tremos, a digital electronic system used to disrupt location and mating of leafhopper species by generation of a disturbance noise as demonstrated by Vincenzo Cavicchi (right) Marketing & Agro Products Manager, on their stand. Although more physical than biological, the approach clearly shows an understanding of insect behaviour and using a novel approach to achieve control and was unanimously selected by the judging panel as this year’s winner.

Visit www.abim.ch for more information. All presentations for this and previous ABIM events are available to registered delegates on the ABIM website.