

Phytopharmaceuticals and valuable plant ingredients - opportunities for industry and agriculture in Baden-Württemberg

The "Phytopharmaka und wertgebende Pflanzeninhaltsstoffe" initiative (Phytopharmaceuticals and Valuable Plant Ingredients) aims to make the key economic issue of phytopharmaceuticals more visible in Baden-Württemberg in order to gain a better understanding of the challenges and needs of the state's pharmaceutical industry. The overall goal is to strengthen the use of secondary plant ingredients in valuable products and build on this to develop opportunities for Baden-Württemberg agriculture.

In addition to bringing industry, research and agricultural practice together, the initiative primarily sets out to identify the general challenges and concrete needs of Baden-Württemberg industry with regard to pharmaceutically active plants and the opportunities for Baden-Württemberg agriculture. The intention behind the initiative is to focus on and strengthen the entire value chain to benefit the Baden-Württemberg economy as a whole.

Plans to get the initiative off the ground were first implemented in 2021 and it is now firmly established. The initiative is supported by BIOPRO Baden-Württemberg, and has attracted two top-class representatives from research and application to act as co-chairs: Dr. Martin Braun, Vice President Manufacturing at Dr. Willmar Schwabe GmbH & Co. KG, and Prof. Michael Heinrich from the UCL School of Pharmacy, London. The two men bring their knowledge and experience to help bridge the gaps between the different sectors.

Initial findings are promising: the pharmaceutical industry is particularly keen for Baden-Württemberg farmers to replace imported plant mass, which is associated with potential quality issues that include the presence of (unwanted) residues. Some cultures are based on plants grown in the wild and if they are not harvested properly, this could harm the ecosystems where the plants come from. It might even be feasible to grow many plants that are currently imported organically in Baden-Württemberg. Reducing the transport distance between growing areas and the locations where they are processed ensures better ingredient quality.

"The cultivation of medicinal and aromatic plants and the securing of sustainable value chains on the back of this, offers as many opportunities as it does challenges, all of which need to be addressed in detail. This concerns everyone, from the agricultural sector to consumers," explains Prof. Dr. Michael Heinrich, co-chair of the initiative.

"Baden-Württemberg is home to internationally leading companies in the field of herbal, anthroposophic and homoeopathic medicines, and is a perfect starting point for cultivating these types of plants locally," says Dr. Martin Braun, the other co-chair.

Growing medicinal and aromatic plants could also be a stable source of revenue for Baden-Württemberg's agricultural sector. However, potentially high revenues are offset by a much higher labour requirement than for conventional crops such as corn and cereals as well as by lack of cultivation experience. Sales opportunities are also often unclear, which is why contract farming over extended periods of time tends to be the rule here. However, this practice deters some farmers while others will not even consider these medicinal and aromatic plants, as their agricultural training does not cover such niche crops. So there is plenty to work on, which is what the initiative will be doing in the future.

The initiative is open to new members; any companies, researchers, farmers and other stakeholders that are interested are welcome to contact BIOPRO Baden-Württemberg. Key information can be found in the sidebar on the right-hand side.

The "Phytopharmaceuticals and Valuable Plant Ingredients" initiative is funded by the Baden-Württemberg Ministry of Food, Rural Areas and Consumer Protection as part of the government's goal to implement its "sustainable bioeconomy strategy".

Further information

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Fachinitiative Phytopharmaka/wertgebende Pflanzeninhaltsstoffe

Die Fachinitiative Phytopharmaka/wertgebende Pflanzeninhaltsstoffe hat die Weiterentwicklung der Themenfelder Phytopharmaka und darüber hinaus wertgebende Pflanzeninhaltsstoffe in Baden-Württemberg zum Ziel.