



15th ICA Rectors and Deans Forum 2025

Navigating Complexity: ICA Leading the Circular Bioeconomy Transformation

to be held on 16 and 17 October 2025
at BOKU University, Vienna, Austria

A The goal of the annual ICA's Rectors and Deans Forum

This ICA Forum, for Rectors, Presidents, Deans, and senior academic and management staff in life science Universities in Europe, aims to provide these university decision makers from ICA's member universities with the opportunity to meet, to discuss current issues in the bioeconomy and life sciences, and to exchange views on these issues with relevant stakeholders in industry, government and NGOs.

B Background & Rationale

As the bioeconomy continues to gain prominence as a key driver of sustainable development, life science universities have a critical role to play in shaping and implementing policies that foster innovation, sustainability, and resilience. These institutions are at the forefront of knowledge generation, technological advancements, and capacity-building necessary to transition toward a circular and sustainable bioeconomy. However, translating scientific insights into effective policies and practical applications requires strong collaboration between academia, policymakers, and industry and public society resulting in socially engaged life sciences using interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches.

This forum provides a dedicated platform to explore the evolving **Science–Policy Interface** and to showcase best practices in **knowledge mobilization** by ICA universities. By bringing together experts, policymakers, and academic leaders and echoing voices of the society, the event aims to foster dialogue, share experiences, and identify actionable pathways for universities to actively contribute to bioeconomy strategies at the regional, European, and global levels.

The key objectives of the forum are to:

1. **Bridge the Science – Policy Divide** – Enhance understanding of how life science universities can effectively contribute to the circular bioeconomy policymaking and implementation.
2. **Enhance Policy Coherence** – Explore mechanisms for aligning academic research with national, European bioeconomy strategies.
3. **Showcase Best Practices** – Highlight successful initiatives and collaborative models where universities have driven impactful change in the circular bioeconomy.
4. **Foster Networking & Collaboration** – Encourage partnerships among academia, policymakers, and industry to accelerate knowledge transfer and innovation.
5. **Promote Actionable Solutions** – Identify key takeaways and next steps for leveraging academic expertise in real-world circular bioeconomy challenges.

C Forum Structure & Thematic Focus

Day 1 of the forum sets the stage by exploring how life science universities can actively contribute to shaping bioeconomy policies and strategies at regional, European, and international levels. Through insights from key policy updates, global perspectives, and expert discussions, we will examine how knowledge generated within universities can inform decision-making, support policy coherence, and accelerate the transition toward a sustainable, circular bioeconomy.

Day 2 focus on interactive sharing of practices from ICA universities. Since it's a half-day session, it would be great to keep it dynamic, with space for multiple short interventions and discussions.

D Expected Outcomes

By the end of the forum, participants will:

- Gain deeper insights into the evolving circular bioeconomy policy landscape and life science universities' role in shaping it.
- Learn from real-world examples of how life science universities have successfully influenced policy and implemented bioeconomy solutions.
- Identify challenges and opportunities for strengthening the science-policy interface.
- Foster new collaborations and networks to enhance knowledge transfer and impact.
- Develop a set of **recommendations and action points** to enhance, support and promote the proactive role of life science universities in driving the bioeconomy transition.

This forum serves as a **springboard for stronger engagement between academia, policymakers, and industry**, ensuring that research and innovation from life science universities contribute effectively to a sustainable and circular bioeconomy.

E Programme

Day 1. Thursday, 16 October

12:00 **Welcome Lunch** – Arrival, registration, and networking

13:00 **Opening Session**

Welcome remarks by host university and organizing partners

Maria KNUTSON-WEDEL, Rector, Vice Chancellor, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Uppsala, Sweden

Eva SCHULEV-STEINDL, Rector, BOKU University

Introduction to the theme: "Navigating Complexity: The Role of Life Science Universities"

Maria KNUTSON-WEDEL, Rector, Vice Chancellor, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Uppsala, Sweden

13:30 **Setting the Scene: Concepts and Policies**

Keynote "Defining the Circular Bioeconomy in a Complex World"

Martin GREIMEL, Head of the Centre for Bioeconomy, BOKU University, Vienna, Austria

Keynote "Science-based pathways to policy impact"

Luka JUVANČIČ, Head of Bioeconomy research centre, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

14:15 **EU Update on the Bioeconomy Strategy**

Presentation from the European Commission on latest policy developments and strategic priorities

Keynote "Bioeconomy for a Sustainable Europe: Strategy Insights from the Commission"

Jessika ROSWELL, European Commissioner for the environment, water resilience and circular economy (TBC)

Keynote "The new EU Life Science Strategy and its implications for Bioeconomy"

Peter WEHRHEIM, Head of Unit "Food Systems and Bioeconomy" DG Research & Innovation, European Commission, Belgium

15:00 *Coffee break*

15:30 **Beyond Europe: Global Perspectives**

Keynote "Spotlight on G20 initiatives: Case study from South Africa"

Ben DURHAM, Chief director: Bio-Innovation Department of Science, Technology and Innovation, South Africa (Online presentation)

Keynote "Uniting Global Bioeconomy Agendas: Insights from the World Bioeconomy Association"

Jukka KANTOLA, Chair, World Bioeconomy Association

16:00 **Panel discussion: “How can universities align with and influence EU bioeconomy goals?”**

Moderator: Marina PINTAR, Dean Biotechnical Faculty, University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia

Panel:

Theresa KLARA LOCH, President, International Forestry Students’ Association – IFSA
Tapio MÄÄTTÄ, Chair of the EBU Presidency and Rector of University of Eastern Finland

Geert MAESMANS, Cargill Vice President, R&D FOOD EMEA

Mona-Anitta RIIHIMÄKI, Chair of ICA CoP on Bioeconomy education & Häme University of Applied Sciences, Finland

Elena ZEPHAROVICH, Scientific Officer, EC Joint Research Centre, Belgium

17:00 **Wrap-Up of Day 1**

Summary of key insights and preview of Day 2

17:15 *End of the Forum Day 1 / Transfer to Hotels (if required)*

18:30 *Bus from Hotels to Dinner (if required)*

19:00 *Gala Dinner at The Rathaus Vienna & ICA Excellence Award Ceremony*

Day 2. Friday, 17 October

8:30 *Registration & Networking*
– Arrival and informal discussions

9:00 **Welcome to Day 2**

Recap of Day 1 insights

Introduction to the focus: *From ideas to implementation – universities as drivers of change*

9:15 **Spotlight Session: University Best Practices**

Short interventions (5–7 min each) from selected Life Science Universities highlighting successful actions, including:

- Integrating circular bioeconomy into curricula
- Regional bioeconomy hubs and living labs
- Start-ups and spin-offs supporting bio-based solutions
- Cross-sector partnerships with industry and policy-makers

10:30 *Coffee Break*

11:00 **Interactive and action-driven breakout session**

Navigating Complexity: How can ICA further support the transformation of the Circular Bioeconomy

12:15 **Closing Remarks**

- Summary of key takeaways
- Next steps and farewell

12:30 **End of Forum**

Networking lunch

BOKU University Local Programme - Exploring Innovation at BOKU Campus Tulln, Friday 17 afternoon

13:30 Bus departing from BOKU University main campus

This visit offers a unique opportunity to explore cutting-edge research and innovation hubs driving advancements in

**wood material technology,
food and feed quality, &
digital transformation.**

The programme in Tulln:

1. Presentation of Technopol Tulln by Angelika Weiler <https://www.ecoplus.at/en/contacts/angelika-weiler>
2. Walking through facilities of the competence centre Wood material technology (Wood K+) <https://www.wood-kplus.at/en/research-areas/wood-materials-technologies/research-interests>
3. Visiting the Competence Centre for feed and food quality, safety and innovation (FFOQSI) <https://www.ffaqs.at/index.php/en-us/>
4. Finishing with a visit to House of Digitalisation <https://virtuelleshaus.at/en>

The excursion concludes at **16:30**, with **convenient public transport connections** available from Tulln to the airport (~1 hour).

E: Programme Organising Committee

Chair – Marina Pintar, Dean Biotechnical Faculty, University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia

Secretary - Rasa Pakeltiene, ICA Secretary General

Martin Greimel, Head of the Centre for Bioeconomy, BOKU University, Vienna, Austria

Damiano Cilio, Centre for Bioeconomy, BOKU University, Vienna, Austria

Michal Loztak, Senior Vice Rector, Czech University of Life Sciences Prague, Czech Republic

Simon Heath, ICA Deputy Secretary General