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BIOTECH AGRIFOOD INNOVATION: A PRE-ACCELERATION PROGRAM AND CONTEST TO PROMOTE KNOWLEDGE AND TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER IN AGRI-FOOD AND AGRI- ENVIRONMENTAL SECTORS

Agricultural, Marine and Food Biotechnology

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Body

The European agri-food sector needs to overcome several related to sustainability and food security [1]. For this, it is necessary for professionals working in this area to be able to innovate, and to propose solutions that must be based on scientific knowledge, and on models of lifelong and postgraduate education, which allow the efficient transfer of knowledge between industry and higher education institutions [2]. This study aims to develop and implement a contest and pre-acceleration program for business projects in the agri-food and agri-environment areas through academic entrepreneurship. This research involved a single exploratory case study, with primary data collected through instruments developed for the Lab2Business project and observations of different project actions. The contest and program developed was called BioTech Agrifood Innovation. This consisted of three phases: screening/selection/admission, development and assessment/awarding of prizes. Once admitted, participants had to develop a business plan, to prepare a poster to present their idea, and deliver a pitch to stakeholders, for which they were supported by 17 business mentors and attended an 81-hour acceleration program. The two editions of the BioTech Agrifood Innovation contest had 64 competitors, of which 30 were admitted to the contest. All participants were researchers or PhD students, mostly were female (73.3%), under 30 years of age (52.0%), resident in Porto (80.0%). In these two editions, 12 products/services were launched, 7 in the agri-food area and 5 in the agri-environmental area, which gave rise to 5 patentability studies. Projects were evaluated based on product, potential to disrupt, financials and quality of pitch. Four prizes were awarded (2 prizes per category “+ Potential” and “+ Innovation”) worth €2000. The innovation program and contest proved to be easy to implement and replicate among PhD students and researchers in the areas of biotechnology, food engineering, environment, and nutrition. The program and contest allowed participants to consolidate and develop skills and knowledge, complementing their training, namely in management/entrepreneurship/marketing through the development of business and marketing plans for their products. It allowed innovation in agri-food and environmental sector through the development of new products or optimization of processes, also valuing the results of research/doctoral activities.

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[1] Innovation & entrepreneurship driving food system transformation. Lynde, R.. *Physiology & Behavior*, 220, 112866. (2020)

[2] Education for innovation and entrepreneurship in the food system: the Erasmus+ BoostEdu approach and results. Viaggi, D., Barrera, C., Castelló, M. L., Dalla Rosa, M., Heredia, A., Hobbey, T. J., . . . Viereck, N. *Current Opinion in Food Science*, 42, 157-166. (2021)