

Press release

MarginUp! project kicks off to raise the biodiversity and productivity of marginal lands



Consortium visit to the Spanish use-case in Mérida in January 2023.

The EU-funded MarginUp! project has launched to raise the potential for biodiversity and the production of biobased industrial feedstocks on marginal lands. The project is coordinated by the Leibniz Institute of Agricultural Engineering and Bioeconomy (ATB) and brings together 29 partners from eight different European countries and two international partners (Argentina and South Africa) from across the agriculture and bioeconomy sectors.

MarginUp! will develop sustainable and circular value chains to produce bioproducts and biofuels from natural raw materials grown on marginal lands. By introducing climate resilient and biodiversity-friendly non-food crops on marginal and low-productivity lands, MarginUp! will increase farming system resilience, enhance biodiversity, and promote stakeholder participation.

This 48-month-long project began officially in December 2022 and has received a total grant of just under seven million euros from the European Commission within Horizon Europe under the “Circular economy and bioeconomy sectors” programme ([CORDIS](#)).

During the official launch meeting in Mérida, Spain, the MarginUp! Consortium came together for the first time to discuss the work ahead.

“The MarginUp! Project was set up to achieve a breakthrough in the development of circular bioeconomy enterprises that valorise marginal lands while promoting biodiversity and social participation.”

– Dr. Philipp Grundmann, Head of Research Group Sociotechnical Systems and Institutional Change at ATB and coordinator of MarginUp!

Background and need

At present, [60-70%](#) of all soils are unhealthy in Europe as a result of land management practices, pollution, intensive agriculture, urbanisation, and the effects of climate change. Due to this and other biophysical constraints that limit agricultural productivity, almost [30% of](#) the EU 28 region is classified as marginal agricultural land: i.e. land that is of little agricultural or developmental value because crops cultivated on the land are worth less than any rents paid to access the area. Left neglected, these lands continue to degrade, in turn leading to more biodiversity loss and ecosystem damage, leaving the land and surrounding ecosystems more vulnerable to climate change impacts, including desertification.

The MarginUp! project proposes solutions to secure use and return profitability on marginal lands while enhancing biodiversity by cultivating climate-resilient and biodiversity-friendly non-food crops for sustainable for industrial feedstock on marginal lands. This will simultaneously provide an abundant local source of renewable feedstocks to produce high-value bio-based commodities and support ecosystem restoration and health.

Working closely with land managers, farmers, and stakeholders from the growing bioeconomy industry, MarginUp! will create sustainable and circular value chains and increase the resilience of rural farming systems. To further improve biodiversity and environmental benefits, MarginUp! will focus on understanding which marginal lands are suitable with the lowest impact for low indirect land-use change (ILUC) biomass production.

Learning from the field: Seven use-cases

MarginUp! Is building on learning from seven use-cases: Five implementations across Europe – in Spain, Greece, Sweden, Germany, and Hungary – as well as use-cases in Argentina and South Africa, together increasing the replication potential of the project’s results. The consortium’s 29 partners will work together to identify best practices for sustainable biomass production and biobased products that safeguard biodiversity and local ecosystems. Each use-case

considers the current use and properties of the area and proposes crops and crop rotation strategies that enhance biodiversity and increase soil productivity according to local requirements from Mediterranean soils in Spain to mining lands in Greece, boreal soils in Sweden, wetlands in Germany, desert lands in Hungary, degraded pastures in Argentina, and areas with bush encroachment in South Africa. The proposed crops create a sustainable supply of resources to foster the development of the bioeconomy businesses at local and regional levels while providing ecosystem benefits and building resilience to climate change.

Through these actions, MarginUp! contributes directly to European climate neutrality goals and policies such as the [European Green Deal](#), the [Circular Economy Action Plan](#), the [Bioeconomy Strategy](#), and the [EU Soil Strategy](#).

ENDS

Keywords

- Marginal lands
- Biodiversity
- Bioproducts
- Biomass
- Industrial feedstocks

About MarginUp!

MarginUp! is developing sustainable and circular value chains to produce bioproducts and biofuels from natural raw materials grown on marginal lands. By introducing climate resilient and biodiversity-friendly non-food crops on marginal and low-productivity lands, MarginUp! will increase farming system resilience, enhance biodiversity, and promote stakeholder participation.

Contact

Dr. Philipp Grundmann, ATB

Project Coordinator

pgrundmann@atb-potsdam.de

Marisol Castro Rey, Greenovate!

Communication Coordinator

m.castro@greenovate-europe.eu

www.margin-up.eu

[@MarginUp_EU](#)

[MarginUp! EU](#)



Funded by
the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or REA. Neither the European Union nor REA can be held responsible for them.