

MicrobiomeSupport Association Annual Report 2025

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Membership development

In 2025, the MicrobiomeSupport Association further strengthened its membership base by welcoming nine new ordinary members (<https://www.microbiomesupport.eu/ordinary-members/>), including organisations from Europe, India, the United Arab Emirates, and New Zealand, underscoring the Association's role as a global platform for microbiome-related collaboration.

In addition to expanding its academic network, the Association also broadened its stakeholder base by attracting two industry partners, Active FiberShake and STARFISH Bioscience, as well as one professional society, Applied Microbiology International. This diversification of membership highlights the Association's commitment to fostering cross-sector collaboration and strengthening links between research, industry, and the wider microbiome community.

In 2025, one of the Association's founding members, the University of Bologna, concluded its formal membership. The Association acknowledges the long-standing contributions and continued support provided by the University of Bologna since the Association's inception.

Key activities 2025

Outreach

In 2025, the MicrobiomeSupport Association revised its social media strategy by discontinuing the use of Twitter/X and focusing on LinkedIn as its primary communication channel. The Association's LinkedIn account (<https://www.linkedin.com/company/105134525/>), launched on September 29, 2024, demonstrated strong, sustained growth throughout 2025. By January 22, 2025, the account had attracted 458 followers, and this number steadily increased over the course of the year, reaching 1,475 followers by December 30, 2025. This growth reflects the Association's increasing visibility and the effectiveness of LinkedIn as a platform for engaging the food system microbiome community.

In addition, the Association manages a dedicated LinkedIn account for the Food System Microbiomes Conference (<https://www.linkedin.com/in/food-system-microbiomes-6a868b297/>), supporting targeted communication, outreach, and community engagement around the conference and its activities.

Another outreach activity in 2025 was the editing of the VR film "The Secret Rulers of the World" (<https://youtu.be/8sB3P7ni03g?si=iirL4j1Ktgd5PW9a>) for screenings at Deep Space 8K locations, carried out in collaboration with mindfloat. The adapted film was screened twice at the Ars Electronica Centre Linz, on April 25 and September 5, 2025. Both screenings were accompanied by live

commentary delivered by the Association’s Managing Director, Tanja Kostic, providing scientific and contextual insights and fostering direct engagement with the audience.

At the invitation of the Association’s founding member, Paul Cotter (TEAGASC), several Association partners collaborated on the *Frontiers in Science* lead article “Harnessing Agri-Food System Microbiomes for Sustainability and Human Health” (<https://doi.org/10.3389/fsci.2025.1575468>), which was published on July 31, 2025. Contributing authors included Trevor Charles (University of Waterloo), Luca Cocolin (University of Turin), Lene Lange (LL-Bioeconomy), Emmanuelle Maguin (INRAE), Yolanda Sanz (CSIC), Inga Sarand (Tallinn University of Technology), Angela Sessitsch (AIT Austrian Institute of Technology), Hauke Smidt (Wageningen University & Research), Marco Candela (University of Bologna), Tanja Kostic (AIT Austrian Institute of Technology & MicrobiomeSupport Association), and Martin Wagner (Austrian Competence Centre for Feed and Food Quality). The article reflects the Association’s strong collaborative network and its active role in shaping scientific discourse at the interface of agri-food systems, sustainability, and human health. By December 30, 2025, the publication had attracted a total of 131,3K views and 6,5K downloads, underscoring its strong visibility and relevance within the scientific community and beyond. The publication was further supported by a dedicated article hub entitled “Disentangling Interconnected Microbiomes in Agri-Food Systems” (<https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/science/article-hubs/interconnected-microbiomes-agrifood-systems>), which provides additional context and visibility for the topic. In addition, an accompanying deep dive webinar was held on September 11, 2025, featuring Paul Cotter (TEAGASC) and Tanja Kostic (AIT Austrian Institute of Technology & MicrobiomeSupport Association). The webinar attracted 254 attendees from 69 countries, and the recording was subsequently made available on YouTube (<https://youtu.be/ppiRtOXsviM?si=JsFhx0g2u-6VlxAa>), where it reached over 284K views within three months, demonstrating significant international interest and outreach impact.

Finally, at the invitation of the Association’s founding member, Yolanda Sanz (CSIC), the MicrobiomeSupport Association was presented at the CSIC Microbiome Workshop on October 21, 2025. The presentation, entitled “Food System Microbiomes – From Understanding towards Impact”, was delivered by the Association’s Managing Director, Tanja Kostic, and highlighted the Association’s mission, activities, and contributions to advancing microbiome research and translating it into societal impact.

Collaboration with related initiatives

International Bioeconomy Forum (<https://bio-economy-forum.org/>)

MicrobiomeSupport Association continued its engagement with the International Bioeconomy Forum and its Microbiome Working Group. The activities in 2025 included participation in the working group meeting and providing input to the policy briefs.

World Microbiome Partnership (<https://worldmicrobiomepartnership.org/>)

MicrobiomeSupport Association's members are strongly involved in the activities of the Working Group D: Agrifood System Microbiomes, which is co-chaired by Angela Sessitsch (MicrobiomeSupport Association's president). In the scope of this collaboration, MicrobiomeSupport Association was presented at the One Health World Microbiome Partnership Summit held on June 20, 2025 in Paris, France. Activities planned for 2026 include SWOT analysis of agrifood microbiome applications and technologies that should serve as a basis for further activities of this working group.

Novo Nordisk Foundation (<https://novonordiskfonden.dk/en/>)

In 2025, the MicrobiomeSupport Association and the Novo Nordisk Foundation explored potential avenues for collaboration. The envisaged activity included organising a workshop in 2026 dedicated to environmental microbiology, focusing on identifying remaining gaps and hurdles to the translation of R&D results into practical applications. Although the project could not proceed due to a lack of funding, both parties remain committed to exploring alternative opportunities for collaboration in the future.

EU projects

MicrobiomeSupport Association is actively participating in the EU project DELICIOUS (<https://www.deliciousproject.com/>). Activities in 2025 focused on planning stakeholder engagement in collaboration with the Cluster Food+I (WP lead: Dissemination, communication & exploitation) and RISE (project coordinator). The foundation was laid during the Stakeholder engagement workshop held at the project's annual meeting on November 4, 2025. In addition, the project was presented with a poster at the Food System Microbiomes 2025 conference.

In 2025, the MicrobiomeSupport Association participated in preparing the proposal for the HORIZON-CL6-2025-01-CIRCBIO-08 call "Bioprospecting and optimised production of the terrestrial natural products: new opportunities for bio-based sectors". The proposal entitled "Harnessing terrestrial microorganisms for next-generation agricultural solutions (NextGenAgro)" was coordinated by the University of Bologna, and the Association was involved in preparing the WP Dissemination, Communication and Exploitation activities, focusing on stakeholder engagement.

For 2026, MicrobiomeSupport Association and INRAE agreed to co-coordinate preparation of the proposal for the HORIZON-CL6-2026-02-FARM2FORK-12 call “Leveraging R&I knowledge on microbiome”. INRAE will act as project coordinator, with the Association being co-coordinator and leading stakeholder engagement activities.

Further collaborations are planned within the scope of the HORIZON-CL6-2026-02-FARM2FORK-11 call “Integrating a holistic perspective in microbiome research for resilient, competitive and sustainable food systems” in collaboration with AIT Austrian Institute of Technology, University of Veterinary Medicine Vienna and European Federation of Food Science and Technology (EFFoST) – all considered as putative coordinators at this point.

Administrative changes

Tanja Kostic, who served as Managing Director of the Association from August 13, 2024, to December 31, 2025, decided not to extend her contract. In December 2025, a successor was appointed: Sarah El-Beidak will assume the role of Managing Director starting in January 2026, with an initial commitment of 75% FTE through December 2026.

Food System Microbiomes Conference 2025

A major highlight was the Food System Microbiomes Conference 2025, held in Wageningen, The Netherlands, from November 25 – 28, 2025. This conference marked the second event organised by the MicrobiomeSupport Association, a milestone in our mission to increase awareness and foster collaboration around food system microbiomes.

The meeting brought together over 180 international delegates and offered a rich scientific programme that addressed different segments of the food system and focused on the role that microbiomes play within and across them. The programme included two keynote lectures (Nicola Segata, University of Trento and Michael Wagner, University of Vienna), 15 invited talks, 18 short talks, 29 science flashes, and 60 posters.

Three outstanding contributions were recognised with prizes for excellence in research:

- Lakhansing A. Pardeshi (Wageningen University & Research): Conservation, evolution and recombination of tailoncins in the genus *Pectobacterium*, and consequences for species and strain level interaction (Best Basic Research)

- Edoardo Zaccaria (Wageningen University & Research): Microbial seeding as an early-life intervention to reduce methane emissions in dairy cattle (Best Applied Research)
- Chiara Traina (University of Turin): Interconnections across microbiomes: How do plant holobionts and food fermentation relate? A focus on Taggascia olive tree ecosystem (Research best showcasing the interconnectedness of microbiomes across the food system)

Special features of the Food System Microbiomes 2025 conference were:

- The early-stage researcher session, “The Many Pathways to Sustainable Food Systems Powered by Microbiomes,” designed and chaired by Ricardo Garavito Duarte (North Carolina State University) and Kevin Jerez-Bogota (Aarhus University), featured exclusively contributions from early-stage researchers. By showcasing emerging talent, the session promoted the young scientists while positioning microbiomes as integral components of sustainable food systems. Research highlighted interconnections across human, animal, plant, food, and environmental microbiomes, reflecting the systems-level thinking required to address global challenges aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- The regulatory workshop, organised by Yolanda Sanz and Javier Moreno (CSIC), provided participants with the latest scientific criteria for evaluating microorganisms used in regulated food products and discussed advances needed in regulatory science to improve guidance for assessing and authorising microbiome applications. Featuring talks by Javier Moreno (CSIC), Rosella Brozzi (EFSA), and Sandrine Claus (STARFISH Bioscience), followed by a roundtable discussion, the workshop delivered expert perspectives to policymakers, industry representatives, and other food system actors, strengthening evidence-based decision-making and knowledge transfer.
- The project exhibition session highlighted ongoing research and innovation from EU-funded projects, including Microbiomes4Soy, TRIBIOME, WHEATBIOME, HoliFOOD, and FoodSafeR, alongside local research infrastructure UNLOCK. By facilitating direct interaction between researchers, industry, and other stakeholders, the exhibition fostered collaboration, networking, and knowledge sharing, providing a dynamic platform for actors within the field of food system microbiomes.

In addition, the conference will be accompanied by a themed collection in the Sustainable Microbiology Journal.

For the Food System Microbiomes 2025 Conference, sponsorship was secured from QUANTUM Europe, Applied Microbiology International, QIAGEN, and ISME.

List of annexes

- JAB 2025 – Accounting report 2025 (incl. audit report) – will be provided in Q1/2025