



*Interregional innovation investments for
biofertilizers and circular bioeconomy
solutions for a sustainable agriculture*

Call: I3-2023-INV1

Action: I3-PJG

Grant Agreement No. 101161143

Deliverable 3.5

**Report on the portfolio of the multi-disciplinary advisory expert
services offered for funded SMEs to implement their projects**

March 2026

V4



Project ID	101161143
Project title	I3-4-BIOFERTILIZERS: Interregional innovation investments for biofertilizers and circular bioeconomy solutions for a sustainable agriculture
Deliverable title	Report on the portfolio of the multi-disciplinary advisory expert services offered for funded SMEs to implement their projects
Deliverable number	D3.5
Deliverable version	V4
Date of delivery	17/03/2026
Reviewed by WP leader	CLUST-ER
Dissemination level	Public
Partner responsible	UVIC-UCC

Version	Date	Contributors	Description
1	02/07/2025	Cèlia Guixé and Ricard Carreras (UVIC-UCC)	First draft
2	07/10/2025	Cèlia Guixé and Ricard Carreras (UVIC-UCC)	Second draft
3	19/11/2025	Cèlia Guixé and Ricard Carreras (UVIC-UCC)	Final version
4	24/01/2026	Cèlia Guixé and Ricard Carreras (UVIC-UCC)	After revision



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1. Introduction

I3-4-BIOFERTILIZERS is a transformative EU-funded project (2024–2027) that promotes interregional cooperation to scale up, demonstrate, and commercialize innovative biofertilizer solutions across Europe. With a total budget of €9.1 million – €6.9 million co-funded by the EU – the project brings together 18 partners from 12 European regions, including SMEs, research centers, innovation agencies, clusters, and public authorities.

As Europe moves toward more sustainable and resilient agricultural practices, biofertilizers and biostimulants offer a promising alternative to chemical fertilizers. They enhance soil fertility, improve crop productivity, and support climate-resilient farming, all while reducing environmental harm. I3-4-BIOFERTILIZERS aims to position these solutions as key drivers of the circular bioeconomy and sustainable food systems. A cornerstone of the initiative is its emphasis on interregional collaboration, fostering knowledge exchange, shared innovation strategies, and the creation of regional innovation valleys.



Figure 1 : I3-4-BIOFERTILIZERS consortium

The project identifies high-potential business cases through in-depth needs assessments and provides both technical and financial support to SMEs along the biofertilizer value chain. Over its three-year duration, the consortium will upscale, pilot, and demonstrate 8 distinct investment projects, each focused on developing cutting-edge biofertilizers, including biostimulants, and implementing sustainable agricultural practices. This comprehensive approach not only addresses existing market and technical barriers but also propels the sector towards greater competitiveness and environmental resilience. The investment cases are:

- Organic fertilizers production from poultry manure
- Production of high-quality liquid biofertilizers
- Biofertilizers production from compost of a biogas plant



- Circular and plant-extract based production of natural biostimulants
- High-quality microbials from agricultural biomass residues
- Scale-up production of a vermicompost-based biostimulant
- Agronomic testing for market launch of PGPR-based biostimulants
- Digital decision support systems for optimal biofertilization

A dedicated fund of €1.8 million from the project will support third-party projects, complemented by advisory services to accelerate market uptake.

Financial Support for Third Parties (FSTP), also known as “Cascade funding”, is a pivotal mechanism introduced by the European Commission to facilitate access to public funding for startups and SMEs.

In the context of the I3-4-BIOFERTILIZERS project, FSTP funding plays a crucial role in promoting interregional innovation and investment in biofertilizers and circular bioeconomy solutions. By targeting assistance to at least 30 SMEs and startups, **this initiative addresses prevailing market and technical challenges in the field, providing not only financial support, but also technical, business and innovation advisory services.**

This report presents the *portfolio of multi-disciplinary advisory expert support services* developed within the **i3-4-BIOFERTILIZERS** project to assist SMEs funded through the cascade funding scheme. The document aims to describe, in a structured and comprehensive manner, the set of advisory services (“portfolio”) that the consortium provides to beneficiary SMEs to help them successfully implement their innovative projects and maximise their impact.

These services are a key part of **WP3**, which focuses on the design and implementation of support actions targeted at the SMEs selected through the open calls. The advisory support service has been conceived as a practical mechanism to complement the financial contribution provided by the cascade funding, ensuring that funded SMEs receive not only economic resources but also tailored technical and strategic guidance to achieve effective project execution.

The advisory framework has been designed to address the **specific technical, legal, financial, and market-related needs** of the selected SMEs. Through this combination of expertise, the consortium seeks to facilitate the **successful development, deployment, and market uptake** of innovative biofertilizers and biostimulants.

The support offered is structured into **two complementary services** within the advisory expert framework:

- **Personalized advisory service:** delivered by experts from the project consortium, who will provide one-to-one tailored advice to the SMEs funded through the cascade scheme.
- **Training sessions:** two open training activities delivered by external experts, designed to complement the individual advisory phase by addressing the most common and relevant challenges identified across the participating SMEs.



The personalized advisory service is structured in several phases to guide funded SMEs throughout the process. After an initial information phase and regional online sessions in which SMEs are introduced to their national reference point, the advisory support is delivered through a digital system based on an online submission form. During two defined submission rounds, funded SMEs can send their specific questions related to five pre-defined thematic areas. Questions are then allocated to the most relevant consortium experts, who provide individualized and practical responses via email. Finally, anonymised questions and answers are compiled into a public Q&A document, ensuring knowledge sharing while respecting confidentiality principles.

After the personalized advisory phase, the submitted questions will be analysed to identify the most frequently raised topics. Based on this analysis, **two training sessions will be delivered by external experts.**

2. Structure and Operation of the Services

2.1 Design process

The advisory support system has been designed collaboratively, based on the input and expertise of project partners, their prior experience in working with SMEs and bio-based products, and the anticipated needs of the funded SMEs. The design of the advisory services follows the principles outlined in Deliverable 1.5, which presents the **Open Science and IP Management Plan**.

This process led to the definition of **five key thematic advisory lines: Access to market, legislation, intellectual property, new technologies and innovation opportunities, and certifications**. Each addressing a specific area of potential difficulty for SMEs during the implementation of their innovation projects. These thematic areas are further detailed in Section 3.

For each advisory line, the expertise available within the consortium has been identified, and based on this, a dedicated list of experts has been defined for each thematic area. These appointed experts will be responsible for reviewing and providing tailored responses to the questions submitted by the SMEs, ensuring that the guidance is relevant, accurate, and directly applicable to their specific needs.

2.2 Personalized Advisory Service: Description and Implementation

The personalized advisory service aims to ensure that the SMEs funded through the cascade funding scheme can consult with consortium experts to support the market uptake of their products. To achieve this objective, the advisory service will operate as follows:



Phase 1. Once the cascade-funded SMEs start implementing their projects, they will receive an email introducing the advisory service, including instructions, timelines, and encouragement to benefit from it, although participation will remain voluntary. Also, during the signature phase with the selected FSTP projects, each project will be assigned a consortium partner to monitor progress and support the SME in identifying and accessing the advisory services.

Phase 2. Regional online meetings (aprox. one per country) will be organized in the respective national languages. These sessions will present the advisory system to the SMEs and introduce their assigned contact person (the “reference point”) within the consortium. Although questions will be submitted via a Google Form, having a named contact person will help SMEs clarify any doubts, both when submitting questions and when reviewing the experts’ responses.

Phase 3. After the initial meetings, the submission period will begin. To facilitate and optimize interaction between SMEs and experts, a simple and user-friendly digital tool (Google Forms) will be used as the main channel for submitting questions related to any of the five advisory areas. Two submission rounds will be defined, and each SME may submit up to three questions per round. This structured yet flexible approach ensures that SMEs can clearly express their challenges while keeping the process efficient and manageable.

Phase 4. After each submission period closes, a two-month response phase will take place. During this time, the task coordinators will meet with thematic experts to allocate the questions, ensuring that each is addressed by the most relevant expert. Individual, detailed, and tailored responses will then be sent by email directly to the respective SMEs.

Phase 5. Once each consultation phase ends, all questions and answers from both rounds will be compiled into a public Questions & Answers (Q&A) document. This document will be made openly available through public repositories in line with the project’s Open Science principles. Only non-sensitive content will be shared, all company-related information will remain confidential, and both questions and answers will be fully anonymised to prevent any identification of specific SMEs.

2.3 Training Sessions: Description and Implementation

In parallel with the publication of the Q&A document, the collected questions will be analyzed to identify the most frequently raised or cross-cutting topics among the SMEs.

Based on this analysis, two external experts, independent from the consortium, will be contracted to deliver two open training sessions, one for each of the most relevant topics identified.



Since project durations can be up to 12 months, but some will be shorter, the two training sessions will be scheduled at different times. The first session will take place in September/October 2026 to provide initial guidance and recommendations that companies can apply during the remaining execution period of their projects. The second session will be held in February/March 2027 and will offer final advice, including how to follow up on projects that have been completed or are nearing completion.

The design of these training sessions will be carried out in close cooperation with Task 6.1 on capacity building. This coordination will ensure that the sessions organized in both 2026 and 2027 do not overlap in terms of topics or audience, allowing stakeholders to fully benefit from each session without being overwhelmed. Additionally, this connection with Task 6.1 will facilitate complementary activities, such as online training, Q&A sharing, and other follow-up resources.

These sessions will provide in-depth guidance, practical examples, and interactive discussion opportunities, enabling SMEs to address common challenges collectively and to enhance the impact of their innovation projects. The training sessions will be open to all funded SMEs and project partners, further strengthening the shared learning environment of the I3-4-BIOFERTILIZERS project.

Table 1. Timeline of Advisory Service and Training Sessions

ACTIVITY	DATES
Advisory Service	Questions 1: Mar 2026 – May 2026
	Responses 1: Jun – Jul 2026
	Questions 2: Aug – Dec 2026
	Responses 2: Jan – Mar 2027
Training Sessions	1st Session: Sep/Oct 2026
	2nd Session: Feb/Mar 2027

2.4 Language and accessibility

To ensure fairness and equal access to the advisory services for all participating SMEs, **all questions submitted to the experts must be addressed in English, and all responses will also be provided in English.** This approach follows the same principle used in the Cascade Funding call, guaranteeing that every funded SME benefits from the same quality of service regardless of their native language.

However, to facilitate access to the service and ensure that language does not become a barrier, each participating SME will have an internal contact point from its own country, allowing communication in the language that best suits them.



Similarly, all **training sessions** will be conducted in English. This ensures consistency across the project and allows the consortium to deliver content efficiently while maintaining a **high standard of participation and interaction**. While English will be the primary language, the consortium will explore additional support measures if needed to facilitate comprehension and engagement, such as providing **summaries or key points in other languages**, where feasible.

By adopting this approach, the project ensures a **level playing field** for all SMEs, promotes effective communication, and maximizes the impact of the advisory services and training activities.

3 Description of the Advisory Services Portfolio

The advisory services have been structured into five thematic lines, each addressing a key area of potential difficulty for SMEs in the process of developing and commercializing innovative biofertilizers and biostimulants.

Each line is supervised by consortium experts with relevant experience and aims to provide targeted, practical, and actionable advice to the participating SMEs.

3.1 Access to Market

- Description

This advisory line focuses on helping SMEs better understand and navigate market access pathways for biofertilizers and biostimulants. It supports companies in identifying suitable market segments, defining value propositions, and developing strategies for product positioning and commercialization.

- Objective

To support SMEs in developing effective market entry and commercialization strategies for their innovative biofertilizer and biostimulant products.

- Types of questions expected

Questions addressed in this line will focus on better understanding the market access routes for biofertilizers and biostimulants, including aspects such as customer segmentation, marketing strategies, and entry into new markets.

- How can I identify and prioritize potential customer segments for my product?
- What distribution channels or partnerships could facilitate market entry?
- How can I differentiate my product from existing solutions?
- What kind of marketing messages or sustainability claims are most effective in this sector?

3.2 Legislation



- Description

This advisory line focuses on **regulatory and legal issues** related to bringing biofertilizer and biostimulant products or services to the market. It provides guidance to SMEs on compliance with existing legislation and helps them understand the requirements affecting the investments and activities funded under the cascade scheme.

- Objective

To support SMEs in identifying and complying with the relevant legal frameworks applicable to their funded projects, ensuring that their products and business activities meet the necessary regulatory and market requirements.

- Types of questions expected

- What are the EU and national legal requirements applicable to my biofertilizer or biostimulant?
- What documentation or certifications are needed to place my product on the market?
- How can I ensure that my production processes meet regulatory standards?

3.3 Intellectual Property

- Description

This advisory line addresses the **protection and management of intellectual and industrial property**, including patents, trademarks, and copyrights. It helps SMEs safeguard their innovations and intellectual assets developed within their funded projects, while also providing guidance on how to avoid infringements.

- Objective

To assist SMEs in understanding how to protect their knowledge and innovation results, ensuring that their intellectual property strategy supports the sustainability and competitiveness of their business.

- Types of questions expected

- What types of intellectual property protection (patent, trademark, copyright) are most suitable for my case?
- How can I register my intellectual property rights at the national or EU level?
- How do I check if my product infringes existing patents or trademarks?
- What are the potential costs and benefits of protecting my innovation?

3.4 New Technologies and Innovation Opportunities

- Description

This advisory line aims to help SMEs explore and adopt new technologies that enhance the efficiency, quality, and sustainability of their biofertilizer and biostimulant products. It also supports companies in identifying emerging trends, innovative technological solutions, and collaboration opportunities with research centers or technology providers to foster applied innovation.



- Objective

To guide SMEs in leveraging the opportunities offered by emerging technologies, such as advanced fermentation processes, digitalization, and precision agriculture tools, to optimize the formulation of their products, validate new developments, and strengthen their competitiveness in the market.

- Types of questions expected

- Which emerging technologies could be applied to improve the efficiency or quality of my product?
- Are there any new tools, equipment, or processes that could help optimize the formulation or application of my biofertilizers?
- How can I adapt or integrate an existing technology into my specific production process?
- What pilot tests, trials, or technological collaborations would be recommended to validate a new solution applied to my product?

3.5 Certifications

- Description

This advisory line focuses on **certifications** that can help SMEs add value to their products, validate performance claims, and ensure compliance with mandatory standards. It includes both **mandatory certifications** required for market entry and **voluntary certifications** that can enhance product credibility and market acceptance.

- Objective

To support SMEs in identifying the relevant certifications applicable to their products, understanding the associated procedures, and leveraging certification as a tool to improve competitiveness and trust among clients and partners.

- Types of questions expected

- What certifications are mandatory for biofertilizers and biostimulants in my target markets?
- What voluntary certifications (e.g., organic, sustainability, quality labels) could increase product value?
- Which organizations or laboratories are authorized to issue these certifications?
- What are the steps, timelines, and costs associated with certification?

4 User Guide for SMEs

This section provides practical guidance for the SMEs funded through the i3-4-BIOFERTILIZERS cascade funding scheme on how to access and benefit from the advisory expert support services. The aim is to ensure that all participating companies understand the process, the timeline, and the tools available to interact with the consortium experts.



- 4.1. Access and Participation

All funded SMEs will receive an invitation email including:

- An overview of the advisory services.
- The five advisory lines.
- The Google Form link for submitting questions.
- Key dates for submission, feedback, and training sessions.

Participation is voluntary but strongly recommended, as the support directly contributes to the success and market readiness of each SME project.

- 4.2. Submitting Questions

Questions must be submitted via the Google Form available during the open periods. SMEs can submit **up to three questions per period**, selecting one of the five advisory lines for each query. The submission periods are as follows:

- **Questions 1:** March 2026 – May 2026
- **Questions 2:** August 2026 – December 2026

During these periods, SMEs are encouraged to provide clear and detailed questions, including relevant context such as project description, TRL, target market, or specific challenges they would like support with. This ensures that the guidance received will be relevant and tailored to their needs.

Recommendations for submission:

- Keep questions clear and concise.
- Provide sufficient context (e.g. short project description, TRL, target market).
- Indicate any specific challenge or decision to be supported.

- 4.3. Expert Responses and Q&A Compilation

After each submission period, consortium experts will review and answer all questions by email during the corresponding response phase. During this phase, the task coordinators will meet with the experts for each thematic area and allocate the questions, ensuring that each question is answered by the expert with the most relevant experience in that topic. Once assigned, each expert will respond individually to each company, providing detailed and tailored answers.

The submission and response periods are as follows:

- **Questions 1:** March 2026 – May 2026
- **Responses 1:** June – July 2026
- **Questions 2:** August 2026 – December 2026
- **Responses 2:** January – March 2027

Each SME will receive individualized feedback, and all responses will be compiled into a shared, anonymized “Questions & Answers” (Q&A) document.



- 4.4. Follow-up Training Sessions

Based on the most frequently raised topics, two online training sessions will be organized by external experts.

- **Focus:** The two most demanded advisory topics.
- **Audience:** All funded SMEs and project partners.
- **Format:** Online sessions conducted in English. While English will be the primary language, efforts will be made to provide transcriptions or summaries so that participants can translate them into their own languages if needed.
- **Timing:** the first session will take place in September/October 2026 to provide initial guidance, and the second session will be held in February/March 2027 to offer final advice and follow-up recommendations.