



Press release

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Genopole Young Biotech Award 2016: Biostart wins €100,000 first prize

Having convinced the jury unanimously, the company Biostart was named laureate of the sixth edition of the Genopole Young Biotech Award at the awards ceremony held Tuesday 13 December at the Caisse d'Épargne headquarters in Paris. Two of the five finalists also took home special prizes: the project Spiris won the Industrial Potential prize and Unibiome the International Potential prize.



From left to right, the Unibiome, Biostart and Spiris teams.



Biostart wins first [prize valued at €100,000](#)

Biostart co-founders Bertrand Duval and Fabrice Grenard could not hide their emotion when their company was announced as the competition laureate, a recognition of years of work—and sometimes sacrifice—and a promise of new perspectives for growth, as underlines Bertrand Duval: *"For us, Genopole accreditation is a windfall, a key. Tomorrow, we will be able to present our project to investors and our industrial and academic partners. Here, things begin materializing. We have our patent, we have Genopole accreditation; doors will be opening! With Genopole's accompaniment, we will be able to start our search for funding with the goal of recruiting rapidly."* The jury's decision for Biostart was unanimous, recognizing a mature, solid and pertinent project focused on providing a durable response to a major issue in public health.

The Biostart team comprises four associates: Bertrand Duval and Jean-Baptiste Loiseau, both veterans of the pharmaceutical industry, Bernard Rougier, a professor of social sciences at Sciences Po and Fabrice Grenard, a community consultant in public and environmental law.

Together, they developed an innovative biotech project with the *"goal of producing a positive impact in environmental remediation."* Their project is built upon the production of a molecule, a cyclodextrin polymer, derived from environmentally-neutral plant-based components. The polymer captures a large spectrum of chemical micropollutants present in wastewater. In so doing, it gives expression to the strict demands of European framework directives that oblige Member States to target the treatment of 40 priority wastewater micropollutants. The polymer has already been tested for robustness and will soon be subjected to real-conditions use in a wastewater treatment plant.

According to Biostart, its process is more efficient, more ecological and less expensive than the other techniques currently being used. Biostart targets a clientele of wastewater treatment companies and polluting industries. The market is estimated at €1.5 billion. In the long-term, Biostart is also considering an expansion into soil and air remediation.

[Biostart, video interview with Bertrand Duval \(in French\)](#)

Unibiome wins the special International Potential prize (value: €50,000)

Unibiome is a team of five young (average age: 24!) students, Ihab Boulas (cofounder and CEO), Sophie Gontier (cofounder and CTO), Shazzad Mukit (cofounder and COO), Juan Manuel Garcia (cofounder) and Prateek Garg (cofounder), who met in the international masters program "Interdisciplinary Approaches to Life Sciences" of the Paris Descartes-Paris Diderot Universities. They originate from France, Bangladesh, Spain and India and have complementary competencies in microbiology, synthetic biology, bioethics and business.

In 2015, as members of the Paris-Bettencourt team, they won a gold medal at iGEM, the largest worldwide competition in synthetic biology, held annually in Boston (USA). They also won the Kirchner Food Fellowship prize at the Thought For Food competition held in Zurich (Switzerland), and benefit from an investment from SOSV.

Genopole brings new recognition to their *"promising and ambitious"* technology.

"We are very happy to have won the International Potential prize and are already perceiving the benefits," commented Ihab Boulas. *"Discussions with investors start as early as this evening and the services associated with the prize will obviously accelerate our growth and visibility."*

Sharing the same ambition, the five partners are determined to bring a solution to the problem of malnutrition in emerging countries, like India or Brazil, and inversely to the problem of nutritional



overconsumption in developed countries. *"Our vision is long-term,"* explains Ihab Boulas. *"We intend to use biotechnologies to improve the nutritional value of food without obliging actions on the consumer's side, no supplements to buy (vitamins, minerals), no ingredients to add to their plates. Our solution is non-invasive. It's also modular, which allows us to address the specific needs of different market segments."*

One of Unibiome's developments is a second-generation baker's yeast that increases the bioabsorption of the iron present in bread. Another Unibiome prototype increases the nutritional value of idli, a type of cake consumed daily in India. The probiotic formulation integrated in the idli batter during its industrial fabrication increases the amount of vitamins B9 and B12.

Unibiome's business model is based on the selection and enhancement of patented bacteria and yeasts that are in turn licensed to food & agriculture industries.

[Unibiome, interview with Ihab Boulas](#)

Spiris wins the special Industrial Potential prize (value: €50,000)

Vincent Nicolas, 27 years old, and Bernard Sacy, 34, have known each other for only a year and yet they get along like lifelong friends, forming a complementary and amiable duo. That quality of the team did not go unnoticed by the jury, nor did its very clear vision of the industrialization of its innovation.

Vincent Nicolas, who underlines being a "farmer's son", graduated from Agro Paris Tech, worked in technical management for a start-up specialized in urban agriculture, and thereafter became an independent consultant in that same sector. Bernard Sacy was born in Beirut where he began his studies at the American University of Beirut before continuing his education path at ESCP in France. A counselor in industrial management, Bernard Sacy had already experienced the creation of a start-up, but the real moment for him was when he met Vincent Nicolas. The latter had been working for several months on the development of an innovative system capable of affordably producing spirulina at a large scale. The encounter between the two men was a catalyst.

"Spirulina is the food of the future! It's the most nutritive food that we have on earth; it's rich in proteins, calcium, minerals, antioxidants, iron and more." On the stage at the Groupe BPCE headquarters, Bernard Sacy holds a frozen steak in his left hand and a spoon filled with spirulina in his right: *"Both contain the same amount of protein, but the production of the spirulina requires 1600 times less water, 200 times less agricultural land and furthermore enables the capture of CO₂."*

Ninety percent of the spirulina consumed in Europe is imported from China or the United States. With its technology, Spiris aims to reduce Europe's dependency on imports, and make it possible for the European food & agriculture industry to integrate a high-quality, locally-produced spirulina in its products.

"We have shown proof of concept in the lab and built a small exterior demonstrator in Massy (Essonne department) to verify that everything functions correctly in real conditions, before deploying extensive culturing at a larger farm," explains Bernard Sacy. Communicating his great satisfaction with the prize, he adds: *"This special prize will accelerate our R&D and bring welcome assistance to the structuration of our business as concerns legal issues, intellectual property and strategic orientations."*

[Spiris, video interview with Bernard Sacy \(in French\)](#)



Our congratulations to the other finalists: Actinova, which is developing a technology to control and reduce the amount of pesticides used in agriculture, and Aéromate, which is creating a biological solution for growing vegetables on Paris rooftops using hydroponics.

*** Composition of the jury:**

Alain Pinchart (Chimex - L'Oréal); Arnaud Autret (Seventure Partners); Alexandra Berrafato-Droniou (BPCE); Michael Krel (Sofinnova Partners); Valérie Brunel (Abolis Biotechnologies); Karim-Franck Khinouche (CEO Novolyze); Françoise Olier, (deputy director of Genopole); Hakim Kharrat (director of Genopole Enterprises); Miranda Nally-Delmotte (project manager at Genopole).

Genopole warmly thanks its sponsors, who, through their financial support and offer of services (legal expertise, market studies, international management, intellectual property, innovation financing, pitch training, etc.) contribute well-rounded support to the competition laureates, covering the fundamentals necessary for the growth of the start-ups. [Click here for prize details](#)

Genopole also thanks all those who participated in the round-table "*Biotechnologies, A Source of Industrial Renewal for France*": Alain Pinchart, director of operations at Chimex; Karim-Franck Khinouche, president of Novolyze; Mathieu Gonçalves, cofounder of Algama; Ariane Voyatzakis from Bpifrance.

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About Genopole Genopole is France's leading biopark for research in genetics and biotechnologies for healthcare and the environment. Genopole unites 82 biotech companies, 19 research laboratories and 25 technical platforms, and is furthermore home to university training programs (University of Évry-Val-d'Essonne). Its objectives are to create and support biotech companies and the transfer of technologies to the industrial sector, favor the development of research in genomics, post-genomics and associated sciences, and promote higher education programs for those domains. Genopole is funded mainly by the French Government (16.5%), the Ile-de-France Regional Council (37%) and the Essonne Departmental Council (28%).

www.genopole.fr

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