

Can you introduce yourself and share what drives your passion for agriculture?

After earning a degree in Economics from the University of Zagreb, I initially pursued a career in finance. However, an internship at a Belgian agricultural consultancy changed my path. Three weeks after my interview, I moved to Belgium. During the six-month internship, I explored Flemish agriculture's key challenges, worked on EU projects, and secured a PhD position at Ghent University's Faculty of Bioscience Engineering. My research focused on using manure-derived fertilisers as alternatives to mineral fertilisers. After completing my PhD in 2017, I continued managing EU projects on nutrient recycling. What drives my passion for agriculture is the opportunity to serve as a bridge between farmers and policymakers, helping to develop innovative solutions that support farmers while ensuring compliance with regulations designed to protect our water resources and public health.



What challenges have you faced in your career and how did you overcome them?

One of the biggest challenges I faced was transitioning into agricultural research, which required me to learn everything from scratch since my previous education was not directly relevant to my new career path. I overcame this knowledge gap through commitment, continuous learning, hard work, and by building a strong support network of mentors and peers I could rely on.

Dr. Ivona Sigurnjak
Researcher and Manager of EU
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What led you to your current role? Was there a defining moment?

The defining moment in my journey was accepting an internship and moving to Belgium. During my studies, I did not have the opportunity to gain international work experience. However, accepting this internship - focused on agriculture rather than my initial interest in finance - allowed me to fully shift my career focus and ultimately pursue a path in the agricultural sector.

What advice would you give to women entering your field today?

Go for it! Agriculture is currently facing numerous challenges, including food security, climate change, environmental protection, and biodiversity loss. Making agriculture more efficient and environmentally sustainable is a long journey, and we need as many hands as possible to make it happen. So, find mentors, build your skills, and don't be afraid to take on these challenges!

How does your work contribute to the future of agriculture?

In my role as a researcher and project manager, I am actively involved in the daily investigation and assessment of practices that can make agriculture more productive and environmentally sustainable. This is done through laboratory and field assessments, where, for example, we evaluate different types of fertilisers. Once research results are available, we focus on developing communication materials (e.g. reports and factsheets) and presenting our findings at conferences and farmer-oriented workshops.

