Jennifer Lewis: spearheading the transition towards biocontrol

Jennifer Lewis was appointed Executive Director of IBMA in 2019. In this role, she represents IBMA in exchanges with the FAO and OECD and works closely with members and stakeholders to advance biocontrol and promote the implementation of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) worldwide.

Prior to joining IBMA, Jennifer served for 10 years on the Certis Europe Management Board, where she led Innovation, Development and Regulatory Affairs. Previously, she was General Manager of Biological Crop Protection Ltd, a company producing beneficial insects for pest control across the UK, Europe and Africa.

Jennifer has more than 35 years of experience in crop protection, having held a range of marketing, regulatory and stewardship roles in the United States, Brazil and Europe. Throughout her career, she has remained a strong advocate for IPM and biocontrol, and for their essential role in supporting more sustainable and regenerative agriculture.

She holds a degree in Agronomy, an MBA, and a Diploma in Sustainable Business Development.

Jennifer Lewis

IBMA Executive Director

What is a key challenge you are tackling right now, and what are you doing concretely to move the needle?

One of my main priorities at the moment is to help speed up the authorisation of biocontrol solutions in the EU. Today, the process is still too lengthy, and that slows down both innovation and uptake in the field. What I am doing concretely is supporting simplification measures that can make the system more efficient, encourage companies to invest in Europe, and ensure that farmers have faster access to biocontrol tools.

Share one practice, tool or approach you have tested that delivers real results. Why would you recommend it?

One innovation that I have seen deliver real results is the use of beneficial insects as part of crop management. Whether in indoor or outdoor systems, these natural enemies can play a major role in controlling pests when they are allowed to establish and flourish. For me, they are also a very concrete sign that the ecosystem is functioning properly. Too often, the discussion focuses only on the negative side effects of pesticides, but in practice, what we see is that when beneficial insects are supported, they can take on much of the pest and disease control role themselves. The real key is to look beyond the crop alone and support the whole ecosystem, especially soil health and biodiversity.

A person, failure or pivotal moment that changed your path or perspective. What did it teach you?

One pivotal moment that really changed my perspective happened in 2007, in a greenhouse in Almería. I was looking at a pepper trial using beneficial insects and mites, where all conventional pesticide applications had been removed and biopesticides were used only when needed. The first-year results showed a 35% yield increase compared with a conventional programme. Honestly, it seemed almost too good to be true, so we repeated the trial and achieved similar results again.

Having already spent 20 years in the crop protection industry, that moment was a real eye-opener for me. It showed me, very concretely, why integrated pest and disease management needs biology at its core. It taught me that biological approaches are not a niche addition, but can be central to both performance and sustainability. After that, I made it a priority to work on programmes built around biological solutions.

What very concrete issue in agriculture is most on your mind at the moment, and why?

What is most on my mind right now is the slow registration process for biocontrol in Europe. Approvals can take up to 10 years, compared with just 2 to 3 years in many other parts of the world, so we urgently need to speed things up if European farmers are to have real access to these solutions.

Photo from the event Innovators by Nature