



Biotechnology applications for the future: These start-ups impressed the jury at the 10th anniversary of the BioRiver Boost! competition

The winners were Akribion Genomics (1st place), Plantman (2nd place) and Ningaloo Biosystems (3rd place).

Düsseldorf/Hilden, September 27, 2023: The winners of the 10th **BioRiver Boost!** start-up competition for life science and biotech founders have been announced. First place was awarded to Akribion Genomics from Zwingenberg, Germany. The Company develops novel CRISPR nucleases into a new class of genetics-based cancer therapies and advanced genome editing tools. Cologne-based companies Plantman and Ningaloo Biosystems made places 2 and 3.

With its award, BioRiver – Life Sciences im Rheinland e.V., the regional association representing the biotech and life science industry in the Rhineland area, aims to strengthen very young start-ups and founding projects. The award enables and supports access to leading life science experts and investors as well as visibility and networking for promising start-ups.

The day-long closing event of the two-part competition took place on September 22, 2023, at the LifeHub of Bayer CropScience in Monheim, Germany, and was also aired live via Zoom. Following an intensive discussion, the expert committee, which included top-level executives from global life science companies, Bayer, Qiagen, Miltenyi Biotec, Lonza, Janssen-Cilag/Johnson & Johnson, as well as from NRW.BANK and High-Tech Gründerfonds, announced the winners. Honorary juror was Prof. Dr. Detlev Riesner, successful founding father and business angel in the biotechnological industry and emeritus of Heinrich Heine University.

The jury made the following awards:

1st place: Akribion Genomics, Zwingenberg

Akribion Genomics, based in Zwingenberg, Germany, focuses on developing novel CRISPR nucleases into a new class of genetics-based cancer therapies and advanced genome editing tools. The company's proprietary G-dase E[®] nuclease allows targeted cell depletion based on RNA biomarkers, with broad application potential across therapeutics and beyond. **Dr. Oliver Grünvogel, Chief of Staff**, accepted the award on site with the words: "We are very proud to being awarded first place at the BioRiver Boost! 2023. The award demonstrates the high transformative potential of our G-dase technology for therapeutic applications and supports our efforts to use our technology to improve products, processes and most importantly patient treatments according to high ethical standards."

Link to the **pitch presentation** of Akribion Genomics: <https://youtu.be/lcodnJ02x8o>

2nd place: Plantman, Cologne

Plantman a cooperative project from the Cologne University Clusters of Excellence in Aging-Associated Diseases (CECAD) and Plant Sciences (CEPLAS), is following an unconventional approach to find potential drugs to treat polyglutamine (polyQ) diseases like Huntington's disease. To explore

how plants deal with toxic protein aggregation, the researchers have introduced the toxic mutant protein huntingtin in plants, which causes cell death in human neurons, finding that *Arabidopsis thaliana* plants actively removed huntingtin protein clumps and avoid harmful effects. By means of synthetic biology, the researchers have transferred the plants' ability into human cultivated cells and animal models of Huntington's disease. "We are very excited to be awarded second place at BioRiver Boost! 2023," said **Dr. Ernesto Llamas, Postdoctoral Scientist at CEPLAS**. "The recognition supports us and our goal to develop plant-derived proteins to treat human neurodegenerative diseases that involve protein aggregation.

Link to the **pitch presentation** of Plantman: <https://youtu.be/OlZeSIPc0Ws>

3rd place: Ningaloo Biosystems, Cologne

Ningaloo Biosystems, a young biotech startup from Cologne, is committed to developing innovative solutions for the production of next-generation biopharmaceuticals. The company's optoelectronic systems in combination with its biological products enable the non-invasive, precise and digital control of various processes in cell cultures, while it can be used to control different parameters in parallel. The technology is suitable for both, research and production applications in the pharmaceutical industry. "Our goal is to develop real-time control options for process engineering to bring cell culture-based production to the next level. This will allow pharmaceutical companies to bring their novel biotechnological drugs against cancer, autoimmune or genetic diseases Through the clinical phases and to market without delay," said **Dr. Herbert Müller-Hartmann, co-founder of Ningaloo Biosystems GmbH**, who presented the project on-site.

Link to the **pitch presentation** of Ningaloo Biosystems: <https://youtu.be/Wl0PqN92WSA>



Dr. Herbert Mueller-Hartmann of Ningaloo Biosystems (3rd place); Dr. Oliver Grünvogel of Akribion Genomics (1st place); Dr. Ernesto Llamas von Plantman (2nd place) © BioRiver e.V

"We would like to give our heartfelt congratulations to all three winners. I am excited that once again received so many excellent and innovative projects from all over Germany and Europe applied," said **Dr. Frauke Hangen**, Managing Director of the industry association, BioRiver e.V. "This year, we celebrate the 10th anniversary of our award for life science start-ups. Looking back, I am especially proud to see how BioRiver Boost! has developed over the years. Thanks to the strong commitment of our network of leading industry representatives and stakeholders, as well as from the board and

members of BioRiver, the award has become a solid entity in biotech start-up world. From the very beginning, the industry was involved as host, jury members, consultants and sponsors of our event.”

The three winning teams will receive customized coaching from experienced entrepreneurs on business development, marketing support from experts as well as the BioRiver membership to ensure long-term access to the BioRiver network.

For the anniversary year, BioRiver also hosted a “World Café” with additional industry experts and investors, who answered questions from the presenting start-ups and all other attendees of the event.

The panel discussion with Dr. Boris Stoffel, Miltenyi Biotec and chairman of BioRiver, Dr. Martina Preu, Bayer CropScience, Dr. Ingo Lehrke, Algiac Pharmaceuticals and Tubulis, as well as Dr. Ralf Angermund of Janssen Deutschland, concluded the program. The awards were presented by leading representatives of BIO.NRW, Bayer CropScience, Qiagen and the board of BioRiver as well as the winner of the previous year, Dr. Andreas Reichert, Lumatix Biotech from Garching/Munich.

About the Start-up Competition BioRiver Boost!

Young companies developing disruptive technologies or innovative services for the biotechnology or life science industry can apply to the BioRiver Boost! start-up competition. Finalists are selected based on specific criteria, such as customer benefit and the degree of innovation of the technology, as well as the experience of the team and the quality of the business plan. In a two-stage process, the jury first selects eight finalists from all submissions, which then give an "elevator pitch" on the day of the competition and answer questions from experts. In a secret vote, the jury then decides on the best three projects. After the awards ceremony, the winners benefit from the extensive BioRiver network and its expertise to further their company's development.

BioRiver Boost! was again supported by numerous sponsors this year. Platinum sponsors were KölnBusiness Wirtschaftsförderungs-GmbH and the City of Düsseldorf. Gold sponsor was Ruhr-IP Patent attorneys, Janssen-Cilag GmbH, Creative Campus Monheim and NRW.Bank. The event was hosted by Bayer Pharma and the LifeHub Bayer CropScience.

Additionally, BIO.NRW, the state association for the biotechnology industry in North Rhine-Westphalia, has certified the award as an important tool to support start-ups. BIO.NRW committed to financially supporting the award in this anniversary year.

About BioRiver – Life Science im Rheinland e.V.

The promotion of founding projects and start-ups has a long tradition in BioRiver – Life Science im Rheinland e.V., and, therefore, receives special attention. The vast majority of the more than 65 life science companies in the association, which includes industry giants Bayer, Qiagen, Miltenyi Biotec and LONZA and Charles River, were originally spin-offs from Rhineland universities. The companies' executives support BioRiver e.V. as chairmen, as board members and in the working groups. BioRiver has more than 100 member organizations.

For more information, please visit www.bioriver.de

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