

FINAL CONFERENCE

Agenda - Plant-Based Fermented
Foods for Healthier and More Sustainable Diets

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25 AUGUST 2026 DAY 1: MICROBIOME & HEALTH

08:00–09:00 Registration, Coffee & Networking

09:00–09:25 Opening Remarks & Project Introduction
Dr Christophe Courtin, Professor, HealthFerm Coordinator, KU Leuven

09:25–10:30 Session 1: Microbial Diversity & Functional Design for Next-Generation Fermentations

- 09:25–09:50** • Food Fermentation Microbiomes: A Blueprint for Designing Foods of the Future - Dr Nicholas Bokulich, Professor, ETH Zurich
- 09:50–10:10** • From Microbial Diversity to Function: Starter Cultures for Plant-Based Fermentations - Dr Rossana Coda, Researcher, University of Helsinki
- 10:10–10:30** • How Genomics can Support Improved Starter Culture Selection - Dr Stefan Weckx, Professor, Vrije Universiteit Brussel

10:30 - 11:10 Coffee Break & Poster Session

11:10–12:00 Session 1: Microbial Diversity & Functional Design for Next-Generation Fermentations

- 11:10–11:30** • Research Highlight Session with 3 PhD Pitches
 - From SNVs to Function: Integrating Genomic Variation and Regulation for the Selection of Optimal Starter Cultures in Food Fermentations
Gabriela Samaniego Vinachi, Doctoral Researcher, Vrije Universiteit Brussel
 - The Chemical Diversity of Cereal-Based Fermented Foods through Untargeted LC-MS Metabolomics - Jan Patrick Tan, Doctoral Researcher, ETH Zurich
 - Substrate-Driven Phenotype Switching of *Leuconostoc Mesenteroides* GSL1 from Optimum to Pulse-Based Food-Like Conditions
Chiara Viretto, Postdoctoral Researcher, University of Bolzano
- 11:30–12:00** • Should we be Eating More Microbes? - Dr Maria Marco, Professor, UC Davis

12:00–13:30 Lunch and Networking Break, Poster Session

13:30–15:15 Session 2: Fermented Foods, Gut Microbiota & Human Health

- 13:30–13:55** • Health Benefits of Fermentation-Driven Changes in Plant Fiber Structure - Dr Kristin Verbeke, Professor, KU Leuven
- 13:55–14:15** • The Human Gut Microbiome: Variation, Diagnostics and Modulation - Dr Jeroen Raes, Professor, VIB (Flemish Institute for Biotechnology)
- 14:15–14:35** • Learnings on the Health Impact of Plant Based Fermented Foods in Humans – Can Protein-Fibre Interaction in Plant Foods Contribute to the Health Impact? - Dr Marjukka Kolehmainen, Professor, University of Eastern Finland

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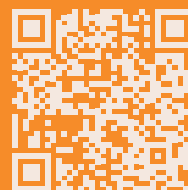
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14:35–14:55	• Fermented Plant-Based Foods and Cardiometabolic Health: Does Fermentation Matter? - Dr Rikard Landberg, Professor, Chalmers University of Technology
14:55–15:15	• Metabolomics in Fermentation Research - Dr Kati Hanhineva, Professor, University of Turku
15:15–15:45	Coffee Break & Poster Session
15:45–16:00	Session 2: Fermented Foods, Gut Microbiota & Human Health
15:45–16:00	• Research Highlight Session with 3 PhD Pitches • Short-Chain Fatty Acids: the Site of Administration Matters - Riet Rosseel, Doctoral Researcher, KU Leuven • Gut-related Health Effects of Oat-based Yogurt Alternative in Individuals with Increased Cardiometabolic Risk - Vilma Liikonen, Doctoral Researcher, University of Eastern Finland • Investigating the Effects of Plant-Based Fermented Foods on the Gut Microbiota by Making Use of an In Vitro Colon Model - Emma Lemmens, Doctoral Researcher, VIB (Flemish Institute for Biotechnology)
16:00–17:25	Session 3: Fermentation Research in Europe
16:00–16:25	• Harnessing Milk- and Water-Kefirs as Representative Fermented Beverage-Associated Communities - Dr Paul Cotter, Head of Food Biosciences, Teagasc
16:25–16:45	• Design of Microbial Solutions for Sustainable and Healthy Fermented Food in Europe: Perspectives & Challenges Illustrated by the DOMINO Project Dr Stéphane Chaillou, Research Director at MICALIS Institute, INRAE
16:45–17:05	• Pathways for Post-Project Valorization and Mid-Term Impact in Horizon Europe Dr Guido Giudetti, Project Officer, EU Research Executive Agency
17:05–17:25	• Building on Success: The Next Chapter of the HealthFerm Community Léna Prochnow, Senior Research and Impact Manager, EURICE
17:25–17:30	Closing First Day Dr Christophe Courtin, Professor, HealthFerm Coordinator, KU Leuven
17:30–19:30	Networking Activity - Happy Hour

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26 AUGUST 2026 DAY 2: FOOD FERMENTATION: TECHNOLOGIES, CONSUMER ATTITUDES & POLICY DIRECTIONS

08:00–09:00	Registration, Coffee & Networking
09:00–9:05	Opening Remarks Second Day Dr Christophe Courtin, Professor, HealthFerm Coordinator, KU Leuven
09:05–10:30	Session 4: Innovative Fermentation Technologies for Plant-Based Foods
09:05–09:30	• Fermentation Induced Changes in Plant Based Raw Materials–Possibilities and Challenges - Dr Kati Katina, Professor, University of Helsinki
09:30–09:50	• Unlocking the Potential of Pulses Through Tailored Fermentation and Criteria-Driven Starter Selection - Dr Raffaella Di Cagno, Professor, University of Bolzano
09:50–10:10	• Utilising the Potential of Oats Through Fermentation Technology Dr Arno Wouters, Professor, KU Leuven
10:10–10:30	• Hybrid Processing Approaches for Meat Biomimetics - Dr Nesli Sözer, Professor, VTT Technical Research Centre of Finland
10:30–11:00	Coffee Break & Poster Session
11:00–12:20	Session 4: Innovative Fermentation Technologies for Plant-Based Foods
11:00–11:20	• Expanding from Dairy to Alternatives - An Industrial Research Perspective Dr Riitta Partanen, Head of Research, Valio
11:20–11:40	• Tempeh: Solid-State Fermentation for Healthier Foods - Dr Maud Langton, Professor, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences
11:40–11:55	• Research Highlight Session with 3 PhD Pitches
	• Designed Fermentation Processes for Healthy and Appealing Oat Products Silvia Cera, Doctoral Researcher, University of Helsinki
	• Innovative Faba Bean Sourdough Fermentation for the Production of Nutritious Whole Wheat Bread - Eline Lambrechts, Doctoral Researcher, KU Leuven
	• From Soaking to Fermentation: Soluble Fiber and β -Glucan Changes in Oat and Faba Bean Foods - Olivia Zehnder-Wyss, Doctoral Researcher, ETH Zurich
11:55–12:20	• Non-Sour Fermentations in Plant-Based Foods - Dr Dennis Sandris Nielsen, Professor, University of Copenhagen
12:20 - 13:30	Lunch and Networking Break, Poster Session
13:30–15:15	Session 5: Consumer Insights, Behaviour & Policy Pathways for Fermented Foods
13:30–13:55	• Comprehensive Lessons from Consumer Studies on Plant-Based Fermented Foods - Dr Armando Perez-Cueto, Professor, Umeå University

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13:55–14:15	• From Expectations to Experience - How Tasting Fermented Plant-Based Foods Shapes Consumption Intentions - Dr Michael Bom Frøst, Professor, University of Copenhagen
14:15–14:35	• Understanding Fermentation Behaviour and Acceptance: Outputs from a Socio-anthropological Approach and its Complementary Nature with Behavioural and Economical Approaches - Dr Maxime Michaud, Researcher, Institute Lyfe/Umeå University
14:35–14:50	• Research Highlight Session with 3 PhD Pitches • Beyond the Prototype: How Meal Design Shapes Acceptance of Plant-Based Fermented Foods - Jean-Paul Garin, Doctoral Researcher, Umeå University • Fermenting as a Social Practice - Maxence Blanchet, Doctoral Researcher, Lyfe Institut • Public Perceptions of Policy Strategies Supporting a Plant-Based Transition in Europe - Arturo Turillazzi, Doctoral Researcher, Umeå University
14:50–15:15	• Panel: Consumer Acceptance of Plant-Based (Fermented) Foods - Moderated by Dr Armando Perez-Cueto, Professor, Umeå University Panellists: Dr Hans de Steur, Professor, Ghent University; Betty Chang, Research Area Lead, EUFIC & Anda Penka, Founder & CEO, Fermentful
15:15–15:35	Coffee Break & Poster Session
15:35–17:00	Session 6: Research, Industry & Policy Pathways for Fermented Foods
15:35–15:50	• Shaping the Future of Food Fermentation Research: Challenges, Opportunities and Priorities - Dr Christophe Courtin, Professor, HealthFerm Coordinator, KU Leuven
15:50–16:10	• Boosters and Hurdles towards Innovation in Fermented Foods - Antonio del Casale, Co-founder & CEO, MICROBION - Microbiology Open Innovation
16:10–16:30	• Food2040 and the Future of Microbiome and Fermented Foods Research - Pierre-Mathieu Pelissier, European Commission
16:30–17:00	• Closing Panel: From Research on Traditional Fermentation to Market-Ready Innovations: Needs & Bottlenecks - Moderated by Dr Adam Adamek, Commercial Innovation Architect in Food Biotech, Impact Brussels Panellists: Stefan Capelle, Group Fermentation Director, Puratos; Dr Christophe Courtin, Professor, HealthFerm Coordinator, KU Leuven; Ruth Roldan Torres, Scientific Officer, EFSA

17:00–17:10	Closing Remarks Dr Christophe Courtin, Professor, HealthFerm Coordinator, KU Leuven
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17:10–18:00	HEALTHGRAIN Forum Early Career Networking Event
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17:10–18:00	Closing Coffee & Networking
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