

# Europe's Bioeconomy: A Call to Action for a Circular Future



— By Sebastian Bartels,  
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Through my work across the sustainability and packaging sectors, I am constantly reminded of a simple but important question: what kind of world will future generations inherit from us? Will it be one still tied to fossil-based materials, or one that embraces renewable and circular solutions? This is more than a technical debate - it is a matter of purpose and accountability, of recognizing that our decisions today shape the world others will depend on tomorrow.



Europe's new **Bioeconomy Strategy**, launched by the European Commission in November 2025, offers a clear answer, but together we must develop the roadmap to get there.

The bioeconomy is a **€2.7 trillion engine of growth**, **employing 17 million people** in Europe, and driving innovation across sectors from agriculture and forestry to biomanufacturing and advanced materials. Every job in the bioeconomy creates three more indirectly, strengthening rural communities and Europe's industrial resilience. As we have just heard during the recent UNFCCC COP30, the **preservation and management** of forests globally must preserve robust social and environmental safeguards.

This is why the FBCA, along with organizations such as **Cepi**, **EPIS** and **ProCarton** have joined forces under the **GreenSource** umbrella, to help turn the 2050 climate neutrality target into reality by promoting the bioeconomy, ensuring that

forests continue to grow, absorb CO<sub>2</sub>, and support biodiversity.

## # The Framework for Change

The updated EU Bioeconomy Strategy sets out four pillars:

- 1. Scale up innovation and investment** – removing regulatory barriers and creating a coherent framework for bio-based solutions.
- 2. Develop lead markets for bio-based materials** – from packaging and textiles to construction and chemicals.
- 3. Ensure sustainable biomass supply** – through better resource management and circularity.
- 4. Harness global opportunities** – positioning Europe as a leader in sustainable materials and technologies.

The goal goes far beyond simply replacing fossil-based plastics with bio-based alternatives. Success for the EU's Bioeconomy Strategy depends on building a predictable environment where innovation can thrive. Practically, that means faster approvals, clear and consistent standards, and funding that helps ideas move from the lab to the market.

## # Why Fibre-Based Packaging Matters

Forest-based industries already deliver a net mitigation effect equal to 20% of EU CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Food and beverage cartons, and the fibre-based

paperboard they are made from, are **renewable, essential and circular**. Due to their functionality, **food and beverage cartons** have a lower carbon footprint for milk and juice, reflecting the core principles of the bioeconomy. Every food and beverage carton manufactured in Europe – along with other products from FBCA’s fellow organizations in the Greensource coalition – uses responsibly sourced fibre, representing a tangible step towards climate neutrality.

Yet, scaling these solutions requires ambition. The EU Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation (PPWR) sets recyclability at scale targets for food and beverage cartons at 55% by 2035, but infrastructure gaps and regulatory uncertainty, as well as missing national collection targets for packaging, threaten the progress we are already making. Our sector cannot afford delays caused by fragmented rules or lack of incentives and targets in collection, sorting and recycling systems. As part of the FBCA’s commitment to harmonization and the circular- and bioeconomy, we have launched newly updated **Design for Recycling Guidelines** for food and beverage cartons, as well as **RECY-CHECK**, the Recyclability Certification Protocol for the assessment of Fibre-Based Composite Packaging. To turn these guidelines and protocols into real-world impact, collaboration with policymakers is essential.

## #A Call to Policymakers

The fibre-based packaging community stands ready to lead, but we need policymakers to act decisively:

- Promote the uptake of bio-based products by recognizing their substitution potential.
- Set ambitious national collection targets and invest in collection and sorting infrastructure to continue to ensure renewable, fibre-based packaging is available for **recycling at scale**.
- Support innovation through funding and streamlined approvals, enabling SMEs to bring bio-based solutions to market.
- Recognize the climate benefits of fibre-based packaging in all relevant legislation.

The upcoming **Circular Economy Act** and secondary legislation under PPWR are critical opportunities to embed these priorities. This agenda therefore is a golden opportunity for policymakers to deliver a bold, forward-looking framework that rewards circularity and sustainability.

## #The Stakes Are High

Europe’s ability to meet its 2040 climate target, maintain industrial competitiveness, and secure a future where families like mine can trust that the products we use every day are part of the solution, not the problem, is essential for the health of the planet and people.

The bioeconomy should be seen as Europe’s growth engine with fibre-based packaging as a cornerstone for net-zero-fifty. Together, we can build a fossil-free future, innovating within the bioeconomy and setting achievable, actionable pathways for a circular future.

## Who is #GreenSource?

#GreenSource is a coalition of Europe’s forest-based industries, uniting the pulp, paper, and packaging industries, and driving the transition to a sustainable, climate-neutral future. By championing renewable, low-carbon, and circular solutions, we actively advance the bioeconomy, reduce reliance on fossil-based materials, and support forest growth, CO<sub>2</sub> absorption, and biodiversity protection.

From sustainable forestry to innovative products, we’re shaping a greener economy —because responsible products start with a green source. Learn more at [eugreensource.org](https://eugreensource.org).

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