

€20 Million Danone-Michelin fermentation platform opens in France

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The Clermont-Ferrand facility will give startups, industrial companies and R&D groups access to pilot-scale fermentation and purification capabilities to move biotech processes closer to commercial production



Danone and Michelin are opening the doors to a €20 million fermentation facility designed to tackle one of industrial biotechnology's biggest bottlenecks: getting promising processes out of the laboratory and into commercially relevant production.

Biotech Open Platform (BIOP), established in 2024 by Danone, Michelin and four other partners, has been inaugurated in Clermont-Ferrand, France, and has begun taking on its first advanced fermentation projects.

The facility is located at Michelin's Innovation Park – Cataroux, within the Sustainable Materials Center. Investment in its first phase has now exceeded €20 million, compared with more than €16 million committed when the platform was announced in 2024.

BIOP includes a complete fermentation line with capacity of up to 15 cubic metres, along with semi-industrial purification systems and bioprocess development capabilities. The infrastructure is designed to operate at conditions representative of industrial production and meet applicable food-production standards.

The platform is open to startups, industrial companies and research organisations working with yeasts, bacteria, microalgae and fungi. Their applications can range from proteins and enzymes to food ingredients, cosmetic actives and bio-based materials.

The commercial proposition is the intermediate step BIOP offers. Companies can develop and validate processes at a scale large enough to produce material for application testing before making the much larger commitment required for commercial manufacturing.

That gap has become a persistent challenge for Europe's industrial biotechnology sector. A process that works in a laboratory does not necessarily perform the same way when fermentation volumes increase, and companies often struggle to find facilities with the equipment and technical expertise needed to make that transition.

"Scale-up requires experience, technical know-how and the ability to solve the issues that appear as the process moves from one scale to another," said Khadidja Romari, CEO of BIOP. She added that confidentiality and intellectual-property protection were critical for companies developing new technologies.

BIOP operates with its own teams and infrastructure, separately from its shareholders, allowing client projects and intellectual property to remain confidential.

The platform also reflects the different strategic interests of its founding companies.

"For Michelin, this is an opportunity to explore new ways of replacing certain molecules currently derived from petrochemicals with more sustainable, bio-based alternatives," said Florent Menegaux, chairman of Michelin Group.

For Danone and the platform's other partners, the facility creates access to fermentation infrastructure that can support the development of biological processes and ingredients at a scale beyond conventional laboratory facilities.

DMC Biotechnologies, another founding partner, sees the availability of scale-up infrastructure as a critical constraint for industrial biotechnology companies. The company develops precision-fermented nutraceutical ingredients and chemical intermediates.

"One of the main barriers to the development of industrial biotechnology is access to capabilities that can demonstrate that an innovation can be produced reliably and competitively at greater scale," said DMC CEO Jim Flatt.

The wider opportunity extends beyond fermentation itself. By allowing companies to generate meaningful quantities of product before committing to full commercial manufacturing, BIOP aims to help them test applications, identify process problems earlier and reduce some of the risks associated with industrialisation.

That could become increasingly important as Europe looks to build domestic capacity in industrial biotechnology, where promising startups can often face a difficult transition from technology development to commercial production.

BIOP is positioning itself squarely in that gap: not as a conventional contract manufacturer, but as an industrialisation platform where companies can prove that biology-based processes can work at commercially relevant scale.