

ERC Starting Grant for IPK root researcher Prof. Dr. Hannah Schneider

Gatersleben, 05.09.2024 **Today, the European Research Council (ERC) has announced the award of 494 Starting Grants to young scientists and scholars across Europe. Prof Dr. Hannah Schneider from the IPK Leibniz Institute is one of the scientists who will receive 1.5 million euros in funding in the period 2024 - 2029. The head of IPK's research group "Genetics and Physiology of Root Development" wants to use the Starting Grant for her FATE project to get a better understanding of the root cortex.**

"We are extremely happy about the freshly granted ERC project for Hannah Schneider. Thereby, the European Research Agency distinguished a highly talented young researcher, who develops new ideas and approaches to explore anatomical roots traits that are highly relevant for stress tolerance and resource efficiency of crops", says Prof. Dr. Nicolaus von Wirén, Managing Director at IPK. "The new ERC project of the scientist from Minnesota, whom we allured to IPK just last October, follows the two previous ERC-Starting Grant holders Martin Mascher and Stefan Heckmann and will bring great international visibility to root research at IPK."

"The ERC Starting grant is a huge recognition for our work. I am very excited to continue our research on root development and am looking forward to continue collaboration with colleagues at the IPK", says Prof. Dr. Hannah Schneider, head of IPK's research group "Genetics and Physiology of Root Development". The FATE project, for which she wants to dedicate the funding, is primarily concerned with the root cortex, which plays a key role in the growth and function of the plant. The project aims to engineer crop roots to better forage soil and capture resources. "This will have significant benefits for global agriculture, as nutrient limitations are a major challenge for crop growth and will become even more critical with climate change", emphasises Prof. Dr. Hannah Schneider.

She was also recently awarded 1 million euros from the Leibniz Professorship Program. This second 5-year project investigates the physiological function and genetic control of a root anatomical trait in barley in the context of multiple environmental stresses including drought and soil compaction. This project will work to develop anatomical traits to be used in breeding programs to improve stress tolerance in barley and other crops.

The ERC, set up by the European Union in 2007, is the premier European funding organisation for excellent frontier research. The funding - totalling nearly €780 million - supports cutting-edge research in a wide range of fields, from life sciences and physics to social sciences and humanities. It will help young researchers at the beginning of their careers to launch their own projects, form their teams and pursue their most promising ideas. Most recently, the IPK scientists Dr. Stefan Heckmann and Dr. Martin Mascher received a Starting Grant in 2020.

"The European Commission is proud to support the curiosity and passion of our early-career talent under our Horizon Europe programme. The new ERC Starting Grants winners aim to

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deepen our understanding of the world. Their creativity is vital to finding solutions to some of the most pressing societal challenges”, says EU Research Commissioner, Iliana Ivanova. “In this call, I am happy to see one of the highest shares of female grantees to date, a trend that I hope will continue. Congratulations to all!”

The successful candidates proposed to host their projects at universities and research centres in 24 EU Member States and associated countries, including Germany (98 grants), the Netherlands (51), the UK (50) and France (49). This competition attracted 3,474 proposals, which were evaluated by peer review panels of internationally renowned researchers. Overall, 14.2% of the proposals were selected for funding. 44% of these Starting Grants were awarded to female researchers.

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Prof. Dr. Hannah Schneider