

Press Release (English)

At the World's First Nature-Based Accelerator, Impact-Driven Entrepreneurs Get Pitch Perfect

Today is Demo Day at the Nature Accelerator, a new initiative backed by impact investor Fledge and the ECOSTAR project, and hosted by the University of Padua in Italy. Eight startups will pitch their sustainable business ideas to investors, following an intensive two-month mentorship and entrepreneurial training program. Startup accelerators are ubiquitous in the tech world. Now, the Nature Accelerator wants to apply the same approach to saving the planet.

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The ECOSTAR Nature-Accelerator graduated its first cohort of nature-based startups today, concluding with a Demo Day at which the startups will pitch their business ideas to private and public investors. The event will be held at the world's oldest botanical garden, in Padua, Italy—a fitting location for the world's first startup accelerator focusing on early-stage impactful businesses in the agriculture, forestry, natural resource and ecotourism sectors.

At Demo Day, the eight startups will pitch innovative business ideas including [cricket-based protein powder](#), [sustainable smallholder-produced Swahili honey](#), low-impact fuels made from discarded palm kernels, a new [app for sharing green spaces](#), [Agritech 4.0](#), [furniture made from discarded wood](#), [cryptocurrency tree-planting campaigns](#), and [sustainable locally-produced cooking oil](#).

The Nature-Accelerator is hosted by Etifor Srl and the University of Padua's Department of Land, Environment, Agriculture and Forestry (TESAF), with seed investment from Fledge, a Seattle-based impact investor. The project is supported by the ECOSTAR alliance of businesses and universities, which include Forest Trends' Ecosystem Marketplace, Forest Design, NEPCon, Ricardo Energy & Environment, the Polytechnic University of Madrid, the University of Manchester, and the Transilvania University of Brasov. The European Commission, the Veneto Region and Fledge have put together a financial package of over EUR1.3 million euros to support ECOSTAR's work to build an entrepreneurship and innovation hub for nature-based companies.

The eight startups hailing from seven countries selected to participate in the Nature Accelerator completed an intensive eight-week program hosted by the University of Padua in Italy, and received EUR \$30,000 in seed investments and support services.

Half of this investment comes from Fledge, which has seen interest in “green” startups grow. “We chose The Nature Accelerator because we wanted to further expand our portfolio in Europe by investing in sustainable startups,” says Fledge’s CEO Michael Luni Libes. “Investing in green startups can be more profitable than investing in public companies and much more incisive. Fledge can count on the investments of more than 60 entrepreneurs who have so far paid around EUR2.5 million into green projects, EUR120,000 of which will go to the [Padua] Accelerator.”

“The University of Padua has rediscovered the importance of working with the public and private sectors to improve the impact of research on the environment and society,” explains Alessandro Leonardi, CEO of Etifor, a company that itself is originally a University of Padua spin-off. “The Nature-Accelerator is an example of how the University and the Research Development Office, together with impact investors and the various companies dedicated to technology transfer, are stimulating a community linked to innovation and entrepreneurship in the agrifood and management of natural resources.”

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ECOSTAR is a hub that promotes entrepreneurship and innovation of companies that invest in nature. The initiative was made possible thanks to the partnership between universities and businesses at the European and the international level; it is co-financed by the Erasmus + Program of the European Union and by private investors. Through networking and training, ECOSTAR connects the academic world with companies and the market. In doing so, it promotes the start and acceleration of new business initiatives that aim to have a positive impact on the environment and society. ECOSTAR is promoted by Etifor and the University of Padova along with partners Forest Trends’ Ecosystem Marketplace, Forest Design, NEPCon, Ricardo Energy & Environment, the Polytechnic University of Madrid, the University of Manchester, and the Transilvania University of Brasov.