

Soufflet Malt and Ferments du Futur accelerate the development of new food applications through solid-state malt fermentation

Paris, France – May 27, 2026 – Soufflet Malt, the world’s largest maltster, and Ferments du Futur (a public-private partnership led by INRAE, the national research institute for agriculture, food and environment and ANIA, the national association of food industries), announce the launch of a research project aimed at accelerating the development of new ingredients derived from solid-state malt fermentation, with an initial application in the creation of a cocoa alternative.

Soufflet Malt’s innovative approach is based on solid-state malt fermentation, which involves cultivating microorganisms on germinated grains to develop specific aromatic compounds. This approach opens up new ways to address supply pressures affecting certain agricultural raw materials.

For example, cocoa is currently under pressure due to climate change and sharply rising prices. This project is therefore exploring how to reproduce cocoa-like flavours using barley malt, wheat, or other sprouted grains.

But the ambition goes further: eventually, this technology could be used to create numerous ingredients derived from grains or legumes for various food applications. It could also enable the development of new flavours, as well as molecules with health benefits, such as vitamins or antioxidants.

Turning malt into new aromatic signatures

By harnessing the texture and colour of malt, the research teams are seeking to optimise aromatic profiles derived from fermentation that are similar to those of cocoa, without adding complementary ingredients. The objective is to rapidly develop a scalable industrial process capable of producing sustainable, cost-competitive substitutes suitable for food applications.

“Given the challenges currently facing the cocoa value chain, innovation and collaboration between public research and industry are essential to developing new sustainable solutions,” commented **Laurent Debande, Chief Growth and Innovation Officer at Soufflet Malt**. *“This project fully demonstrates our ability to co-develop next-generation ingredients with leading partners. By combining solid-state fermentation, industrial malting expertise, and advanced research, we are paving the way for high-performance alternatives that are both sustainable and aligned with the food industry’s evolving expectations.”*

“For the cocoa sector, like other agri-food industries, building a strong link between public research and industry is a key lever for overcoming major bottlenecks,” highlights **Damien Paineau, Executive Director at Ferments du Futur**. *“This collaboration lies at the heart of our mission: to structure and accelerate co-innovation between companies and academic experts. By combining advanced fermentation research and industrial know-how, this partnership perfectly illustrates the strength of the continuum between discovery and market-driven innovation, in the service of safer, healthier, and more sustainable food.”*

From the laboratory to the industrial pilot

The scientific program began in January 2026 and will run for 18 months, following three stages. The first stage will involve identifying the aromatic signatures of cocoa as well as the metabolic pathways that allow them to be reproduced through solid-state malt fermentation. The teams will then conduct work to select and screen microbial strains in order to optimise solid-state

fermentation conditions, notably by incorporating a roasting step to enhance the aromatic profiles obtained at scales up to 10 liters.

In parallel, the project plans to scale up the technology, in conjunction with the launch of a 4-ton pre-industrial demonstrator located in Nogent-sur-Seine within Soufflet Malt's R&D teams. This crucial step will validate the productivity of the strains and culture conditions identified by Ferments du Futur on a larger scale, while preparing for industrialization and providing samples to our partner clients.

About Soufflet Malt

Soufflet Malt is the world's leading maltster, with 40 malting plants across 20 countries in Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia and America. Employing more than 2,300 employees, Soufflet Malt has a production capacity of 3.7 million tonnes of malt annually to meet the demands of its customers – large, global breweries and artisan craft brewers, distillers and other industrial players – around the world. Building on its local farming roots and global reach, including distribution through Country Malt Group in North America and Cryer Malt in Asia, Soufflet Malt acts as a trusted supplier of quality malt, serving customers through brands such as Canada Malting, Great Western Malting, Durst Malz, Bairds Malt, Castle Malting, Tchecomalt, Barrett Burston. With a commitment to pioneer sustainable malt solutions, Soufflet Malt remains steadily focused on innovation across its entire value chain.

Our vision: **Unleash the power of malt.**

For more information: souffletmalt.com

Press contacts:

Soufflet Malt: Brunswick Group | souffletmalt@brunswickgroup.com

Benoit Grange | +33 6 14 45 09 26

Tristan Roquet Montegon | +33 6 37 00 52 57

About Ferments du Futur

Ferments du Futur is an ambitious public-private partnership launched in 2022 by INRAE and ANIA. At the intersection of scientific research and industrial innovation, it brings together 40 active members in 2026, from start-ups to large corporations, including SMEs and mid-cap companies. With an initial budget of 48 million euros, its team of around forty people relies on multidisciplinary expertise and state-of-the-art facilities to turn ferments and fermentations into strategic levers to tackle major food, health, and environmental challenges. Ferments du Futur supports companies of all sizes in developing ferments and fermented products that meet specific functional needs while integrating sustainability considerations. Based in the heart of Paris-Saclay and across nine laboratories in France, Ferments du Futur has established itself as a key player in this innovative field, with 18 advanced research projects funded, carried out nearly ten innovation projects with companies, and supported several start-ups since its launch in 2022.

For more information: fermentsdufutur.eu

Press contact : fermentsdufutur@inrae.fr