

Bayer Crop Science: Creating a Strong Foundation for Innovation with Technology



Julia Maret is the SPI IP Science Technical Lead at Bayer Crop Science, a leading research company in regenerative agriculture. The company's technologies enable farming communities to increase crop production in an environmentally friendly way, helping to feed a growing global population and ensure a sustainable future for farmed land.

Bayer Crop Science is part of the wider Bayer Global, an innovator in healthcare and agriculture, operating in more than 80 countries with almost 100,000 employees.

A biochemist by training, Julia heads a team of four IP specialists. Unusually, the team is not part of the legal department but works in and with the research departments. The team is primarily made up of scientists rather than IP attorneys. This unique approach to innovation enables Julia's team to act like ambassadors between research and IP law.

In this client spotlight, Julia Maret, discusses how ideaPoint helps the IP Science Team at Bayer Crop Science collaborate, organize and prioritize new ideas, and automate and streamline their innovation management processes.

Julia, can you tell us a little about how your team is organized ?

Julia Maret (JM): My team sits within the research organization rather than the legal department and we like to see ourselves as translators between research and legal. We partner with researchers when ideas are first conceived and assist with the IP process through technological development to product launch. Our responsibilities include everything from freedom-to-operate searches, patent drafting,

and agreement drafting. We do this in close cooperation with the legal department.

It's really important for us to be present within the teams we are supporting and knowledgeable about their vision and innovation. At Bayer, we believe anyone can be an inventor. So, our role is to encourage people to be innovative, mine ideas, and then to guide them through the ideation process.

Our IP portfolio is large and very diverse, so our team has to be agile and passionate about learning. We work on new ideas every day,

which I personally find extremely exciting. There is also a lot of IP education involved in our role. Many people understand IP to mean only patents, but our role is to help people see intellectual property is more than just that. SPI at Bayer Crop Science consists of more than 400 people who support crops in dozens of countries. So, we operate as part of a large and diverse organization that generates new ideas on a daily basis.

With a small team supporting such a large global organization and stakeholders around the world, collaboration and efficiency must be incredibly important to you?

JM: This is true, particularly as we work proactively with our researchers, rather than waiting for them to come to us. In 2023, Bayer reorganized its operating model to deliver faster innovation and a better experience for those we ultimately support: the farmers, patients and consumers who depend on our innovation.

The aim was to put power in the hands of innovators and creators within the business – it's called the Dynamic Shared Ownership model. We now operate in mission teams, to more closely reflect the needs of our customers. This has given the team the opportunity to be more involved earlier in the innovation process and to learn more about the technologies we create.

The other benefit is that we can provide earlier input into idea generation. As we all know, patent filings require supporting data. So, we can advise on what is needed to help make the process smoother and bring innovations to the market faster.

There has never been a more important time for innovation in agriculture. Innovation means better solutions and greater choices for farmers. Bayer Crop Science strives to offer farmers better answers to meet the specific needs of their farms, all while preserving the environment.

How do you handle incoming new ideas?

More and more we are taking a systems approach to managing incoming ideas. A systems approach involves taking a holistic view of your innovation management. Before a request came in for an IP analysis, we'd look at it from a request to request or project to project basis. But the issue with this is you can miss a lot of things and you're not looking at the full picture. If you're only focusing on one request or one project at a time, you're missing the opportunity for broader thinking and strategizing.

It's important to us to be able to address critical business-wide questions such as 'where are we strong?', 'where are the gaps?', 'what do our customers need?', 'what resources do we have in hand?'. This perspective allows for greater insight and broader applications, potentially benefiting not just the organization, but the entire company and beyond.

In such a fast-paced environment, how do you deploy IP technology to support your team?

JM: We work across a diverse set of technologies and crops in an ever-changing global market. We rely on IP technology to provide us with two things.

First, we need digestible data. Data helps us see relationships between innovations that might not otherwise be obvious. It gives additional context that helps us see a broader picture of our opportunities and risks. We also rely on technology to deliver automation, which frees up the time to think more deeply about the true potential of ideas.

We use ideaPoint not just as an intake system for innovation but also as a communications tool with our research partners. The software helps us to organize and prioritize our work for data storage and retrieval. It is also a critical tool for consistency. If – for example – one of us is on vacation or away at a conference, ideaPoint enables us to seamlessly take over from each other. It's a really important tool in helping us be more efficient, effective and transparent to the research partners in our business.

One of the things we value most is the ability to work hand in glove to develop ideaPoint in collaboration with Anaqua. It's really helpful to be able to work together to discover and incorporate new capabilities into the software that makes our lives easier and more efficient.

Without our innovation management technology including ideaPoint, we couldn't do the work we are doing right now - and certainly not with the efficiency and quality that we achieve. It would simply not be possible.

You've been using Anaqua's innovation management software ideaPoint since 2020. Can you tell us a little about how it supports your team?

JM: We use ideaPoint not just as an intake system for innovation but also as a communications tool with our research partners. The software helps us to organize and prioritize our work for data storage and retrieval. It is also a critical tool for consistency. If – for example – one of us is on vacation or away at a conference, ideaPoint enables us to seamlessly take over from each other. It's a really important tool in helping us be more efficient, effective and transparent to the research partners in our business.

One of the things we value most is the ability to work hand in glove to develop ideaPoint in collaboration with Anaqua. It's really helpful to be able to work together to discover and incorporate new capabilities into the software that makes our lives easier and more efficient.

Are you looking to use automation more effectively, perhaps through the deployment of AI or other technologies?

JM: Yes. There are already so many tools available to summarize vast amounts of data and others are being developed which will also be helpful. My view is that – as a team, we need to jump in and learn as much as we can.

The tools are getting better at incredible speed, so there's no going back. And that's exciting as it enables us to move at a faster pace in the future. There are also pitfalls of course –so it's important to understand the potential benefits and risks together. Collaboration in the development of new efficiency tools is critical to ensuring we can do this.

Finally, how do you see the future for IP leaders?

JM: I've worked at Bayer for 17 years and the pace of development has never been faster. With all the new tools being developed – particularly around generative AI – there's an opportunity for IP leaders to innovate in the IP space, too.

We need to be increasingly agile and committed to learning – which for me as a scientist is an incredible opportunity. IP innovation that facilitates the adoption of ideas faster and more smoothly is the clear direction for the IP industry.

That was what we were looking to do when we first adopted ideaPoint. We continue to develop the solution further with Anaqua to help us innovate more quickly and effectively. And that is important, because by employing these newly created tools we can change the way we think. And when we do that great innovations happen!