

# APPLYING PRODUCTION AND USAGE OF NEW LIGNIN STREAMS

**CENTER FOR SUSTAINABLE CATALYSIS AND ENGINEERING  
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BELGIUM**

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# OUTLINE

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**Lignocellulose and its biorefinery**

**Lignin challenge ?**

**From carbohydrate to lignin-centered biorefinery**

**Reductive Catalytic Fractionation - RCF**

**What is RCF biorefinery ?**

**Role of catalysis ?**

**Upscale challenges & initiatives at KULeuven (BIOCON)**

**Refined fractions and downstream products**

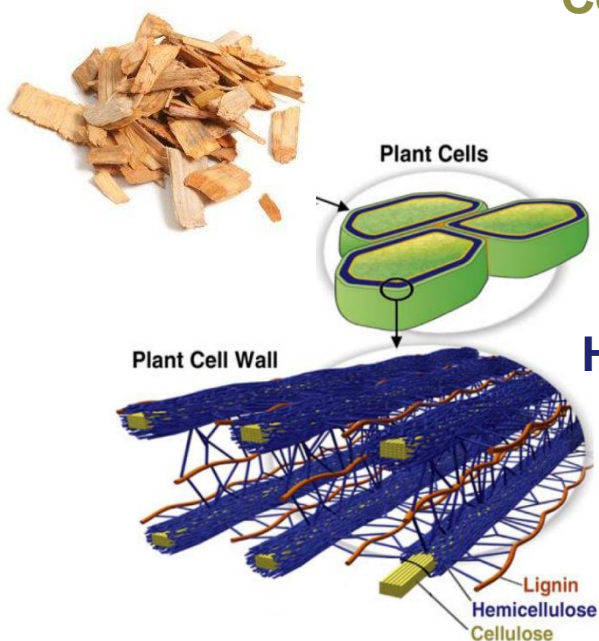
**Conclusion & Perspectives**



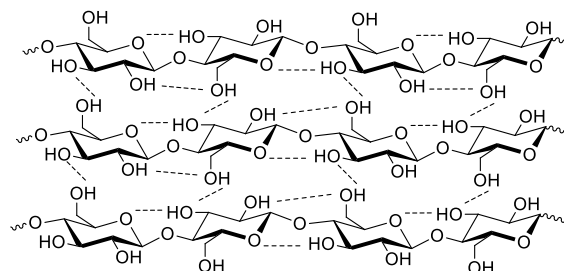
## Biorefining lignocellulose

Lignin Chemistry Ed. Serrano, Luque, Sels *Topics in Current Chemistry Collection*, Springer 2020.

# LIGNOCELLULOSE AND ITS BIOREFINERY



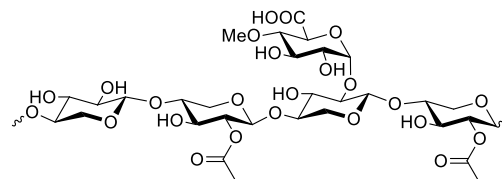
## Cellulose



- 40-60 wt%
- Semi-crystalline
- Rigid fibers



## Hemicellulose



- 10-35 wt%
- Different C5-C6 sugars
- 'Family' of polymers
- Amorphous

## ...and Lignin

- 'Glue'
- 15-30 wt%

# LIGNOCELLULOSIC BIOREFINERY

## Unraveling lignocelullosics into “useful” streams

### Syngas

**Gasification in oxygen** – upgrade by (existing) C1 chemistry (CH<sub>3</sub>OH, Methanol to hydrocarbons, Fischer-Tropsch, ...)

### Bio-oil

**(hydro-)Pyrolysis in inert or (supercritical) solvent (optionally with catalysis)** – novel refinery of oxygenates from both sugar and lignin part – further upgrade to aromatics, olefins, hydrocarbons (biofuel), ...

### Carbohydrate pulps

**Solvolytic or hydrolytic fractionation** (water, organic polar solvent) – sugar chemistry, fermentation, ...

?? Lignin: kraft, alkali, hydrolysis, organosolv

High T  
Original structure loss  
Full solid biomass  
conversion



Low T  
Original structure  
retainment  
Separating products from  
carbohydrate and lignin

# LIGNOCELLULOSE AND ITS BIOREFINERY



Cellulose  
Hemicellulose  
Lignin ?



Polymers  
Lubricants  
Coatings  
Adhesives  
Paint  
Fuels  
...



**Bioaromatics**

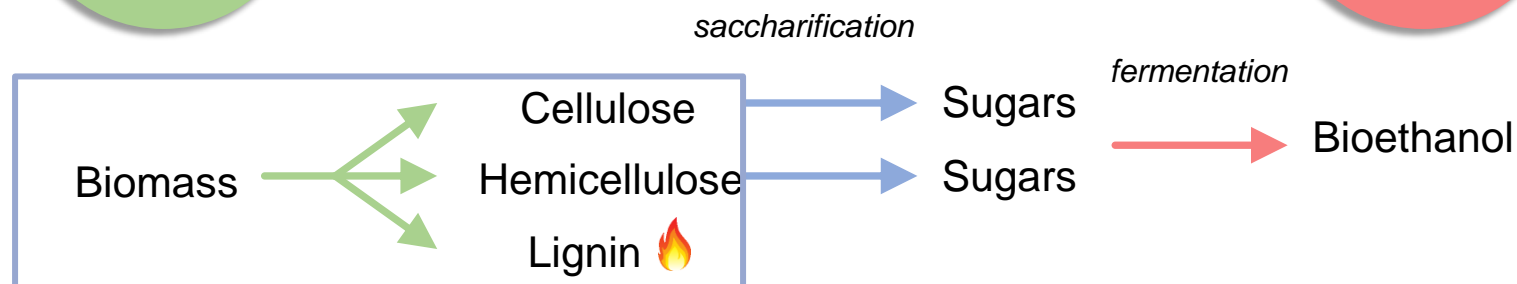
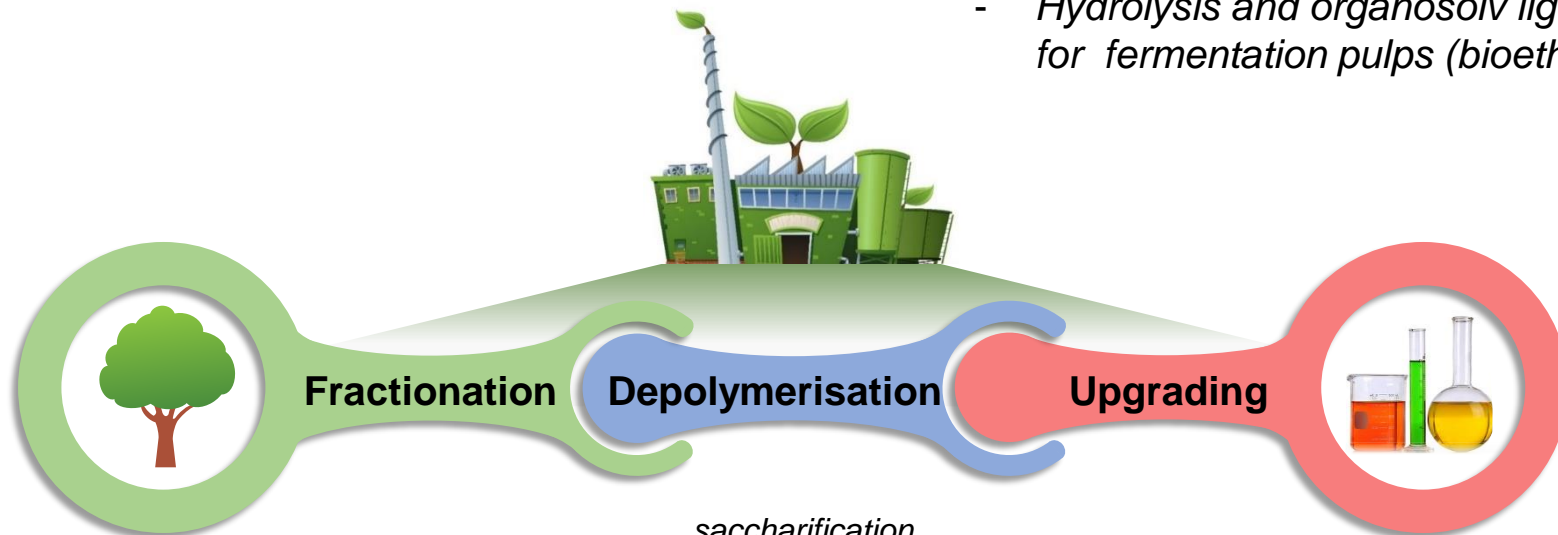
From carbohydrate centered to *lignin-first* biorefineries



# THE CLASSIC SUGAR-CENTERED BIOREFINERY

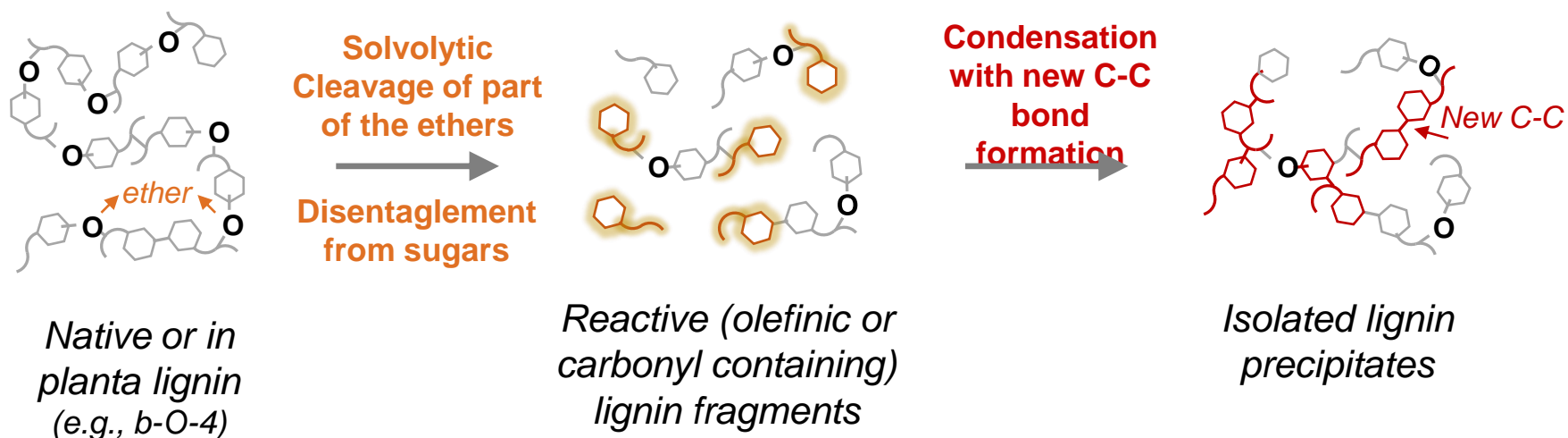
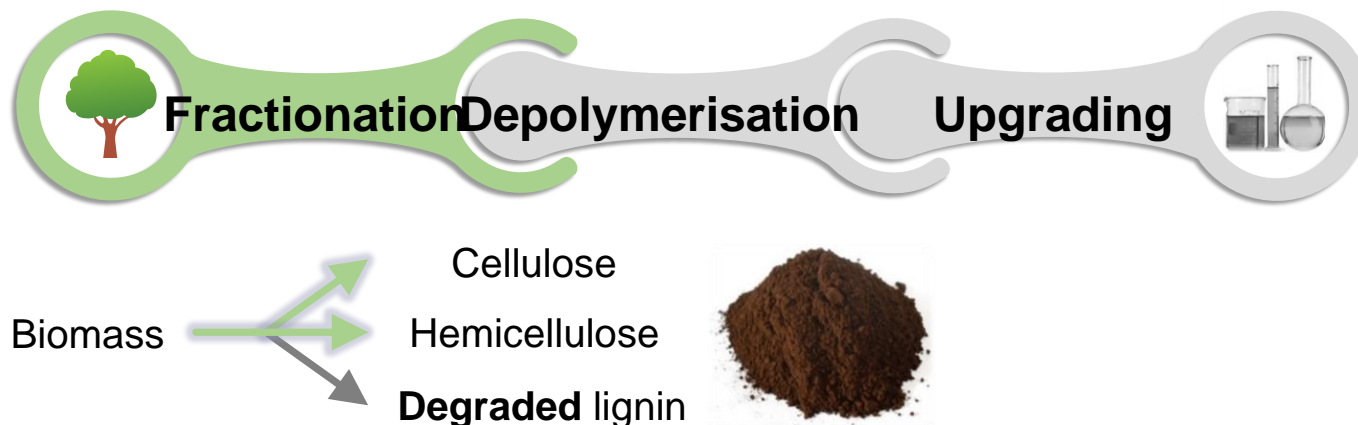
*Examples:*

- Production of paper (e.g., Kraft)
- Hydrolysis and organosolv lignin for fermentation pulps (bioethanol)



*Acid, Base*  
*Enzymes*  
*T*  
*Contact time*  
*Solvent*

# LIGNIN IN A CLASSIC BIOREFINERY ?



# THE LIGNIN CHALLENGE



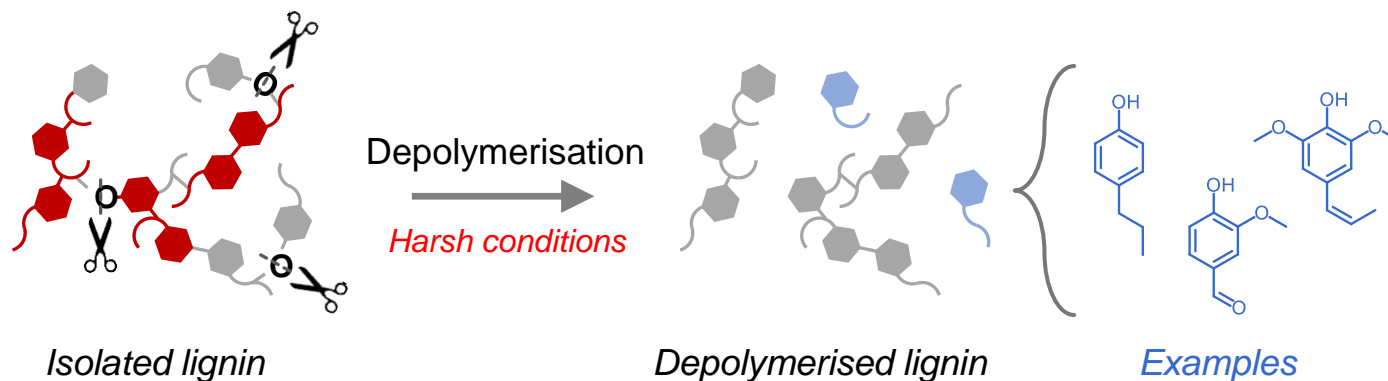
Degraded lignin



Phenolics

(low  
functionalisation)

*(low yield for low MW and  
monomers)*



Refunctionalize the  
available  
commercial lignin

Schutyser *et al.* ChemSocRev 2011  
Renders *et al.* EES 2017

# LIGNIN-FIRST STRATEGIES

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**Lignin protection strategies** while dissolving the pulp in strong acid (step 1) + selective depolymerisation of the isolated lignin (step 2).

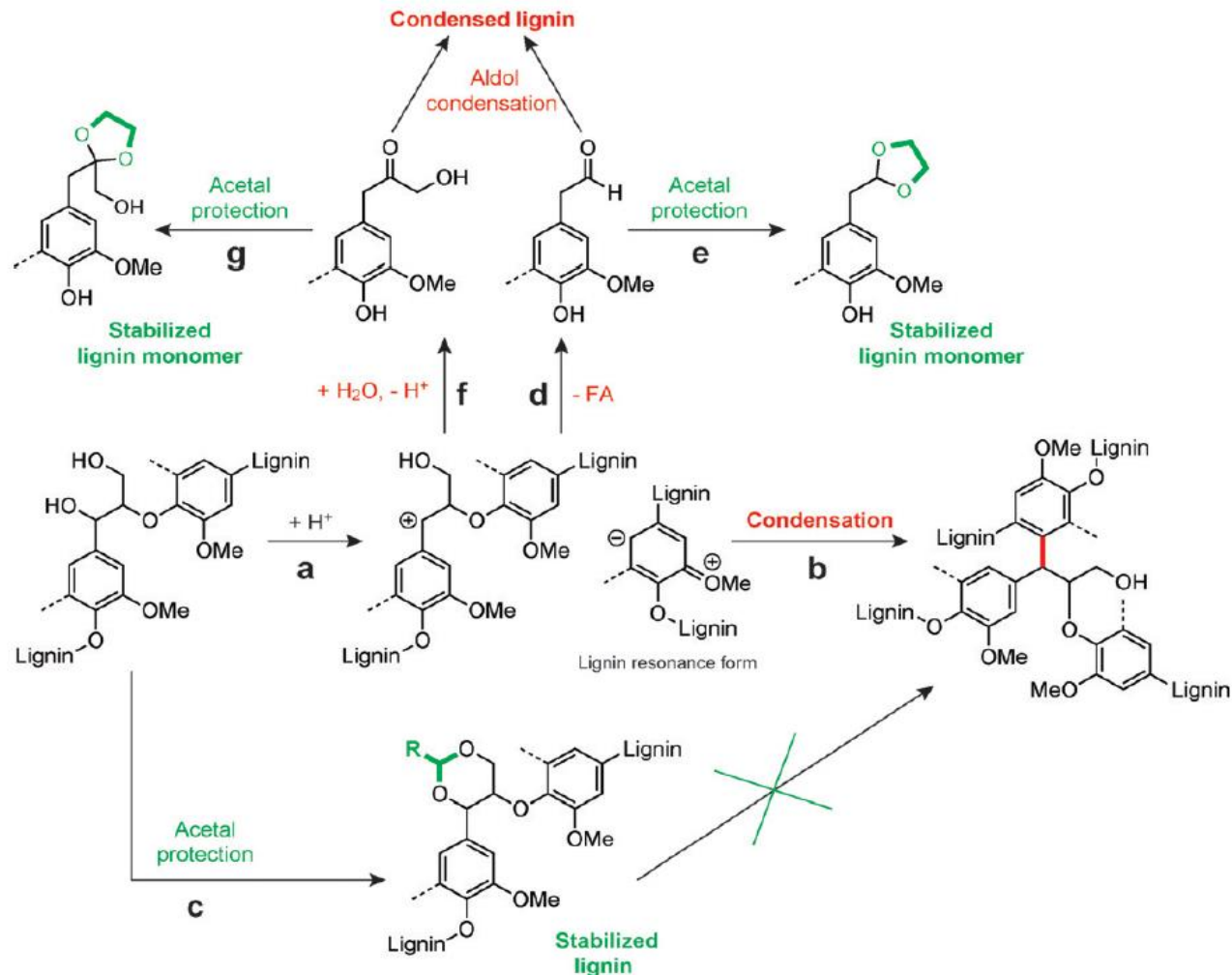
- Aldehydes (Lutherbacher *et al.*)

## **Chemical stabilization** of the reactive intermediates

- Aromatics alkylation (phenolation) – *high MW, high phenol content*
- Glycols (Barta *et al.*)
- Reductive chemistry – monomers to *low MW* (e.g., Song *et al.*, Abu-Omar *et al.*, Rinaldi *et al.*, Barta *et al.*, Sels *et al.*)

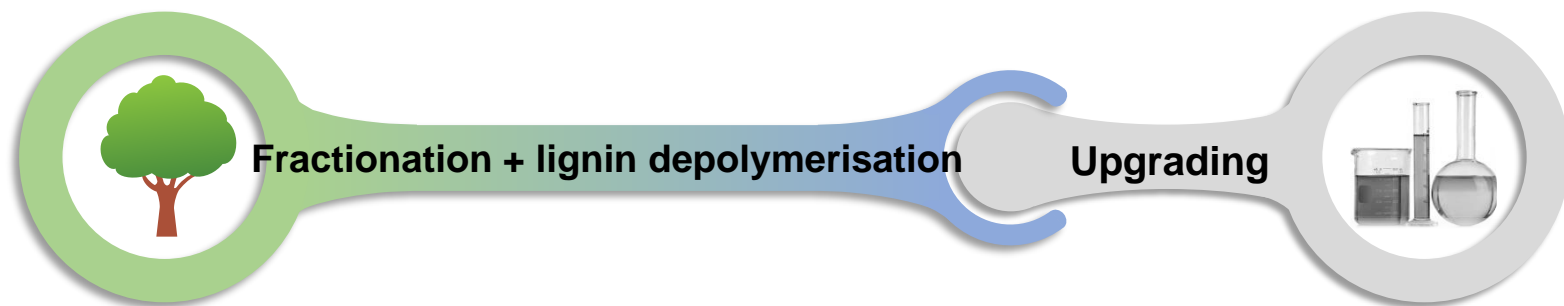
# EXAMPLES OF LIGNIN STABILISATION IN CHEMISTRY LANGUAGE

## A) Lignin stabilization and condensation



# **A NEW CONCEPT: LIGNIN-FIRST BIOREFINERIES**

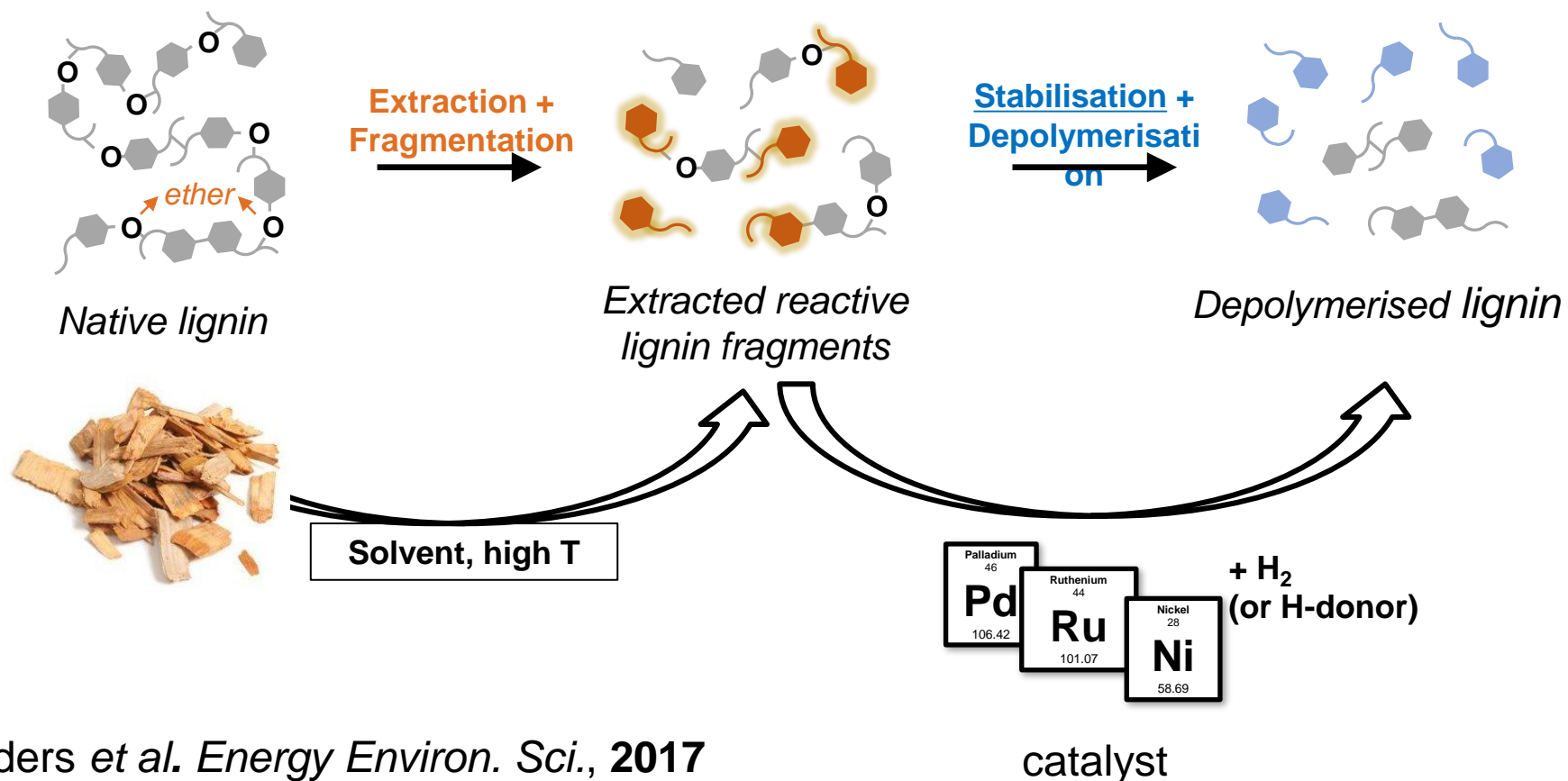
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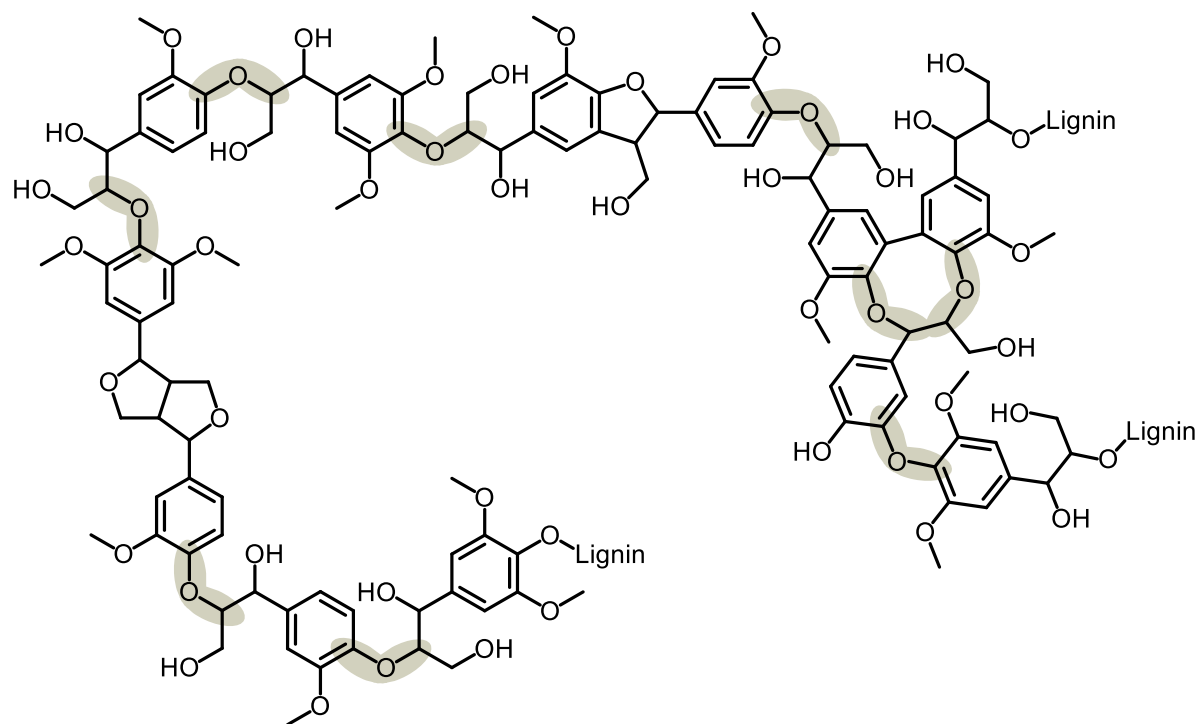
***Lignin-first Biorefineries***  
***'innovative lignin streams'w.r.t novel  
unique structures and properties***

# REDUCTIVE CATALYTIC STABILISATION: CONCEPT

## Reductive Catalytic Fractionation (RCF)

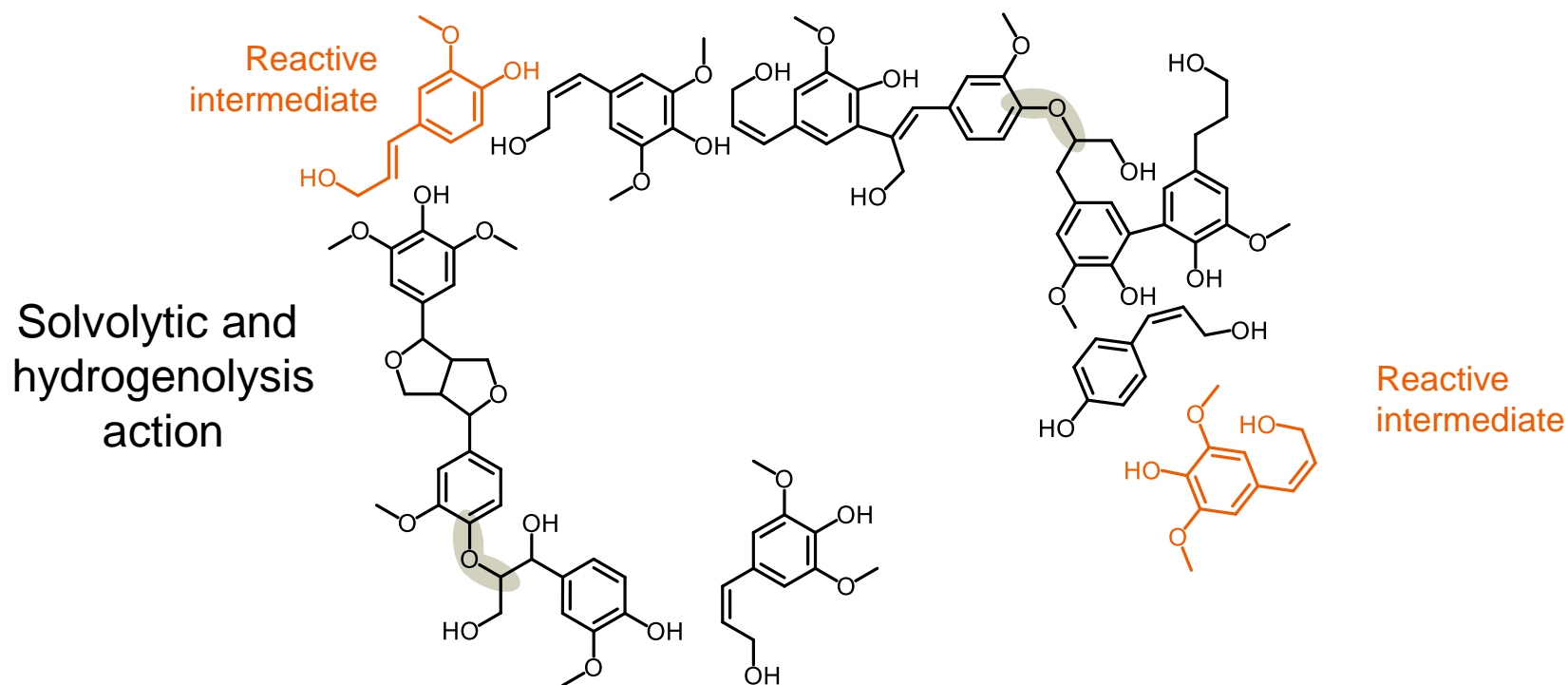


# THE CHEMISTRY OF RCF ...

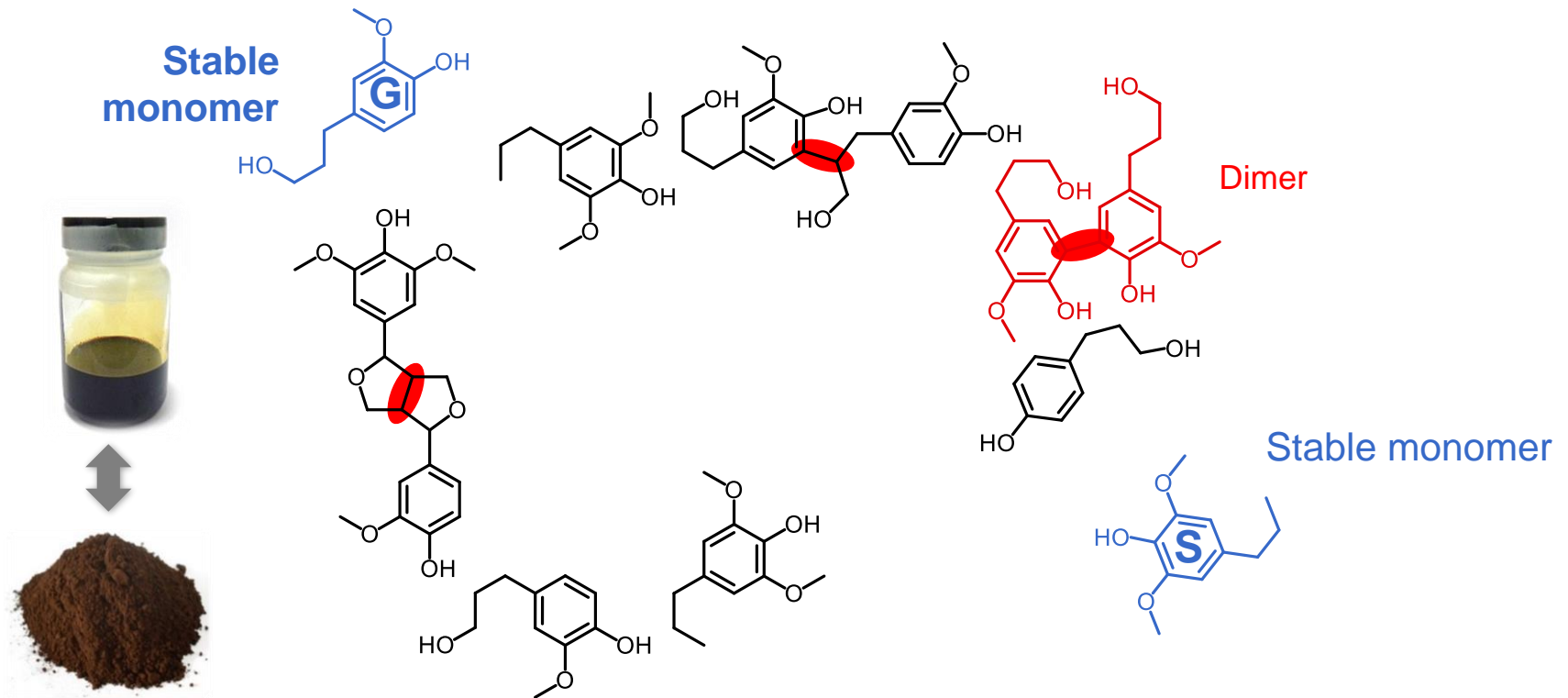




# ... BY CHEMICALLY STABILIZING REACTIVE INTERMEDIATES



# ... INTO STABLE PHENOLIC PRODUCTS



Catalytic hydrogenation action

## ***Lignin-first* RCF biorefinery and the role of catalysis**

# BENCH SCALE RCF BIOREFINERY: Lignin oil - Pulp



**Lignocellulose sawdust**

e.g. poplar, birch,  
pine, eucalyptus



**Solvent**

e.g. methanol



**Catalyst + H<sub>2</sub>**

e.g. Pd/C, Ru/C,  
Ni/SiO<sub>2</sub>

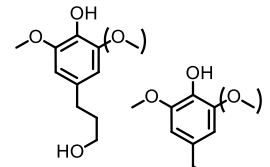


**Batch reactor (100 mL)**  
200 - 250  
°C  
60 - 120 bar

**Delignification yield: > 90%**



**Lignin oil**

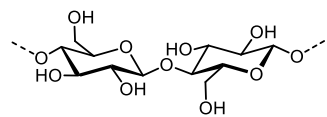


+ dimers  
oligomers



**Pulp (+ catalyst)**

Cellulose  
Hemicellulose



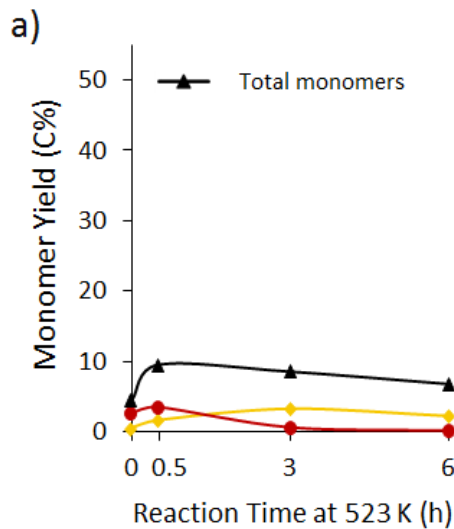
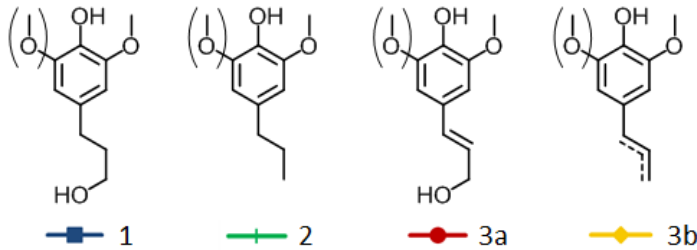
**Pulp retention: > 95%**  
**Hexoses**

**> 85%**

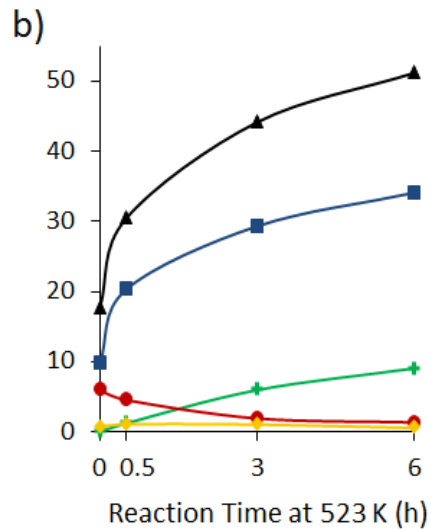
**Pentoses**

Van den Bosch and Schutyser *et al.* *Energy Environ. Sci.*, **2015**  
Renders *et al.* *ACS Catalysis*, **2016**;  
Renders *et al.* *ACS Sustainable Chemistry & Engineering*. **2016**  
Renders *et al.* *Energy Environ. Sci.*, **2017**  
Renders *et al.* *Green Chemistry* **2018**

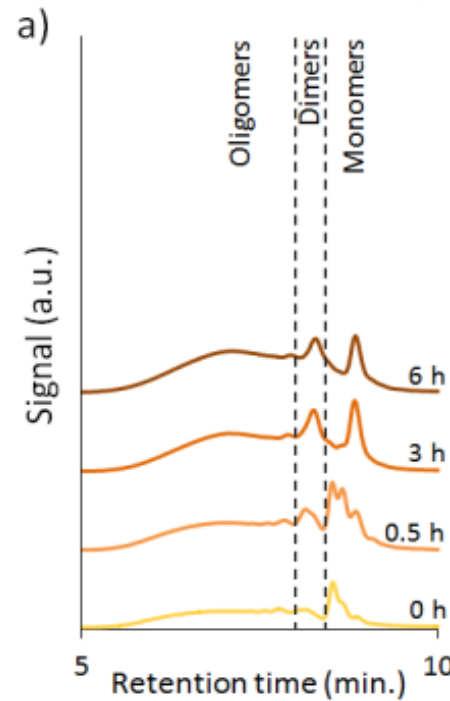
# ROLE OF CATALYSIS: 1. HIGH LIGNIN MONOMER YIELD



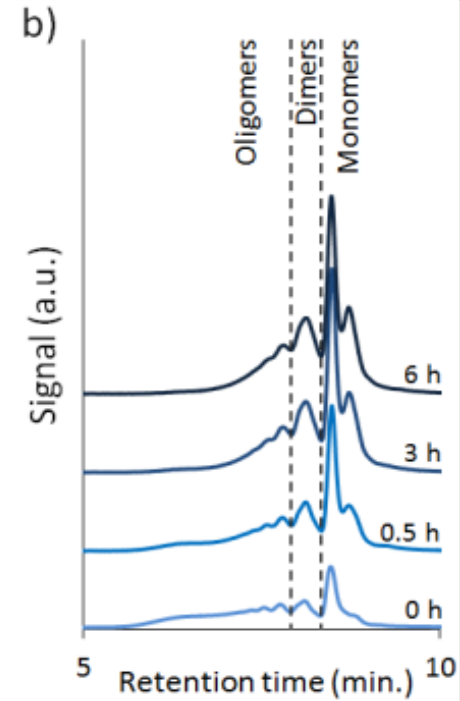
Without Catalyst



With Catalyst

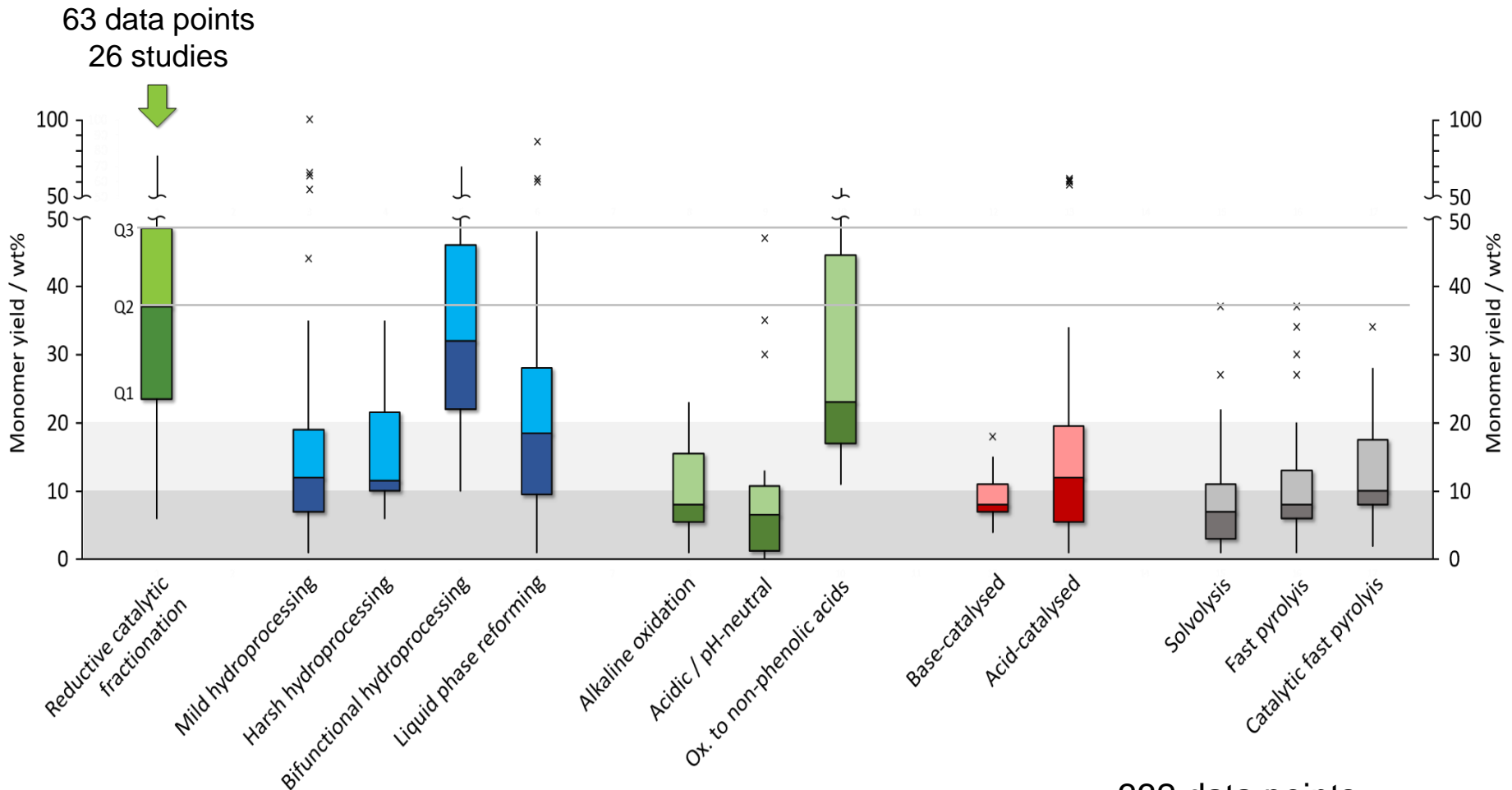


Without Catalyst



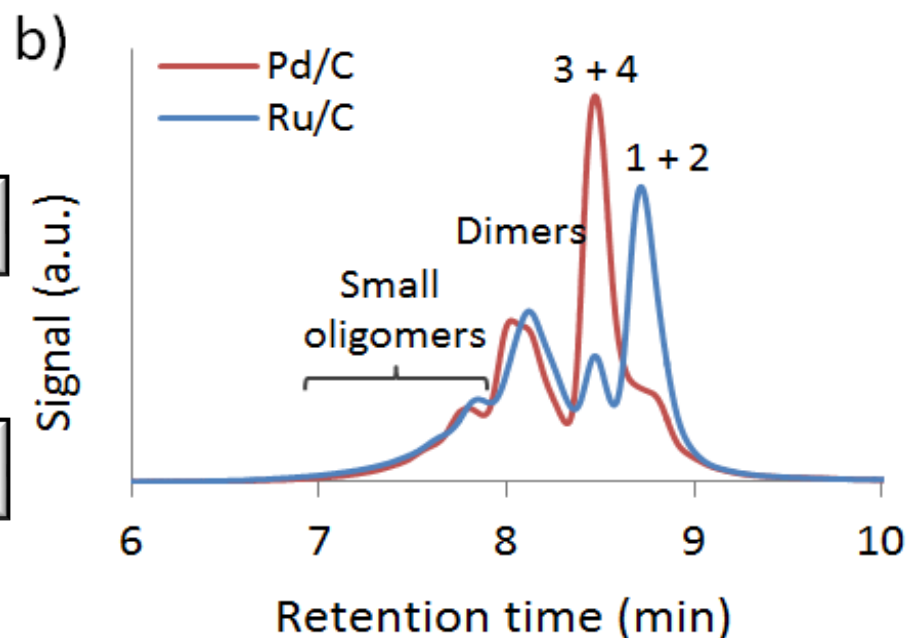
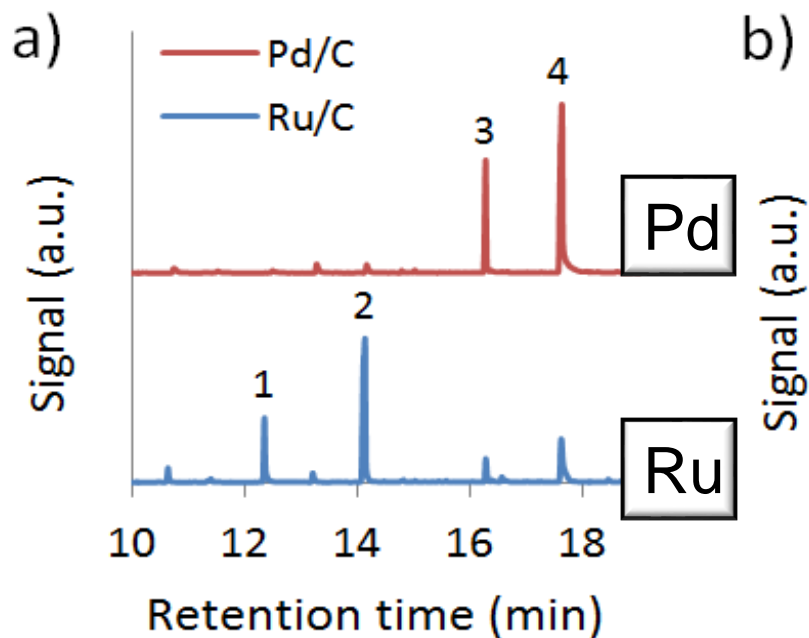
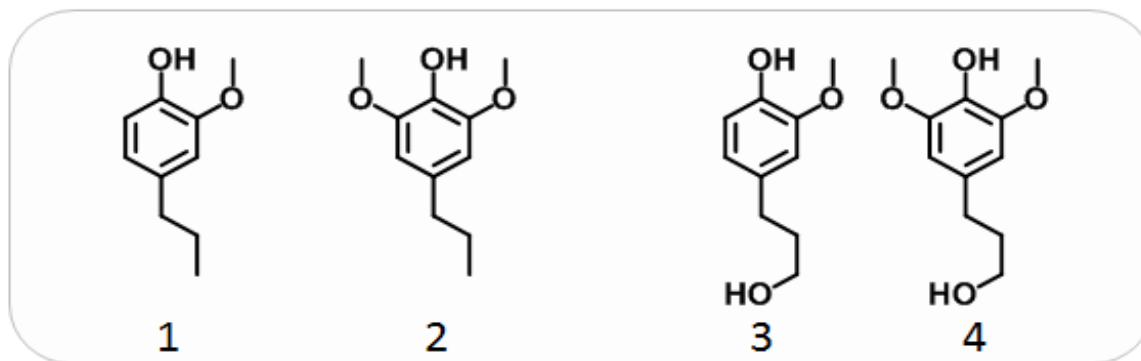
With Catalyst

# MONOMER YIELD IN OTHER BIOREFINERIES

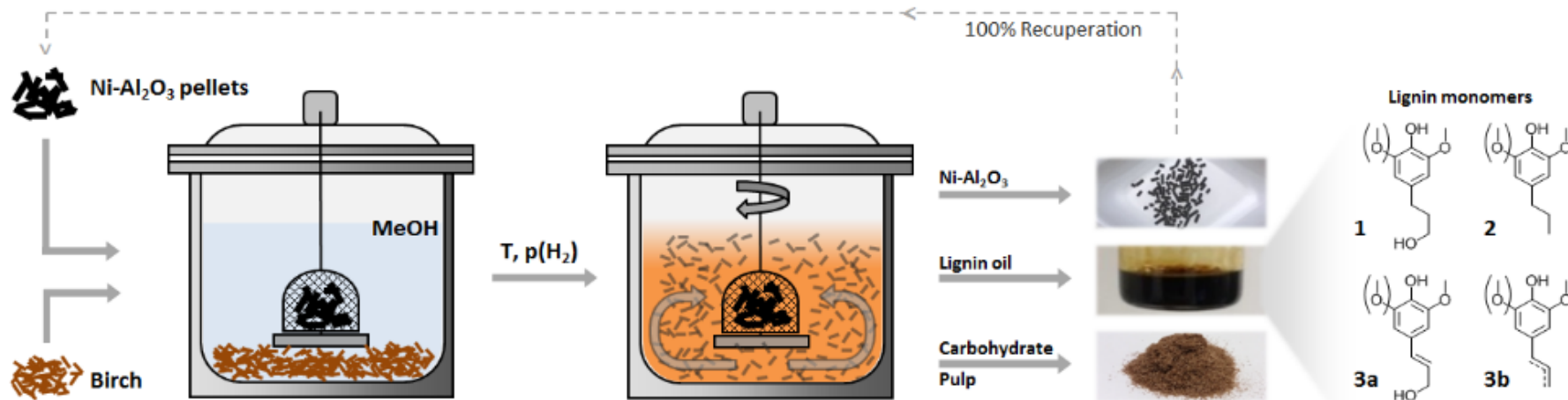


# ROLE OF CATALYSIS:

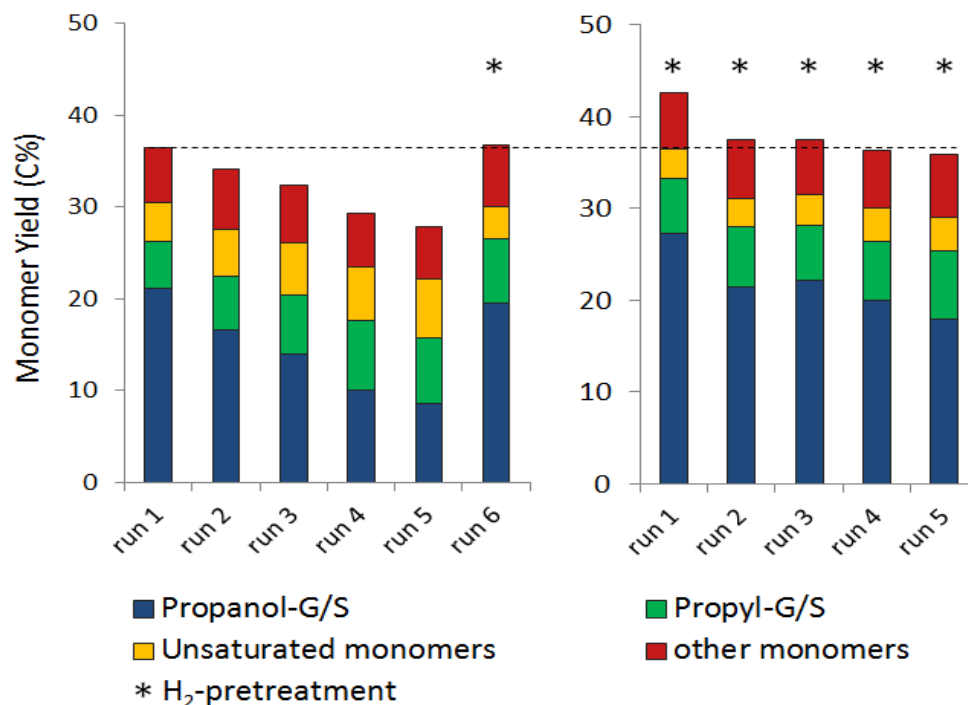
## 2. CONTROL PRODUCT SELECTIVITY



# PRACTICAL CATALYST USAGE AND RECYCLE



2 L facility





## *Upscaling the RCF biorefinery at KULeuven*

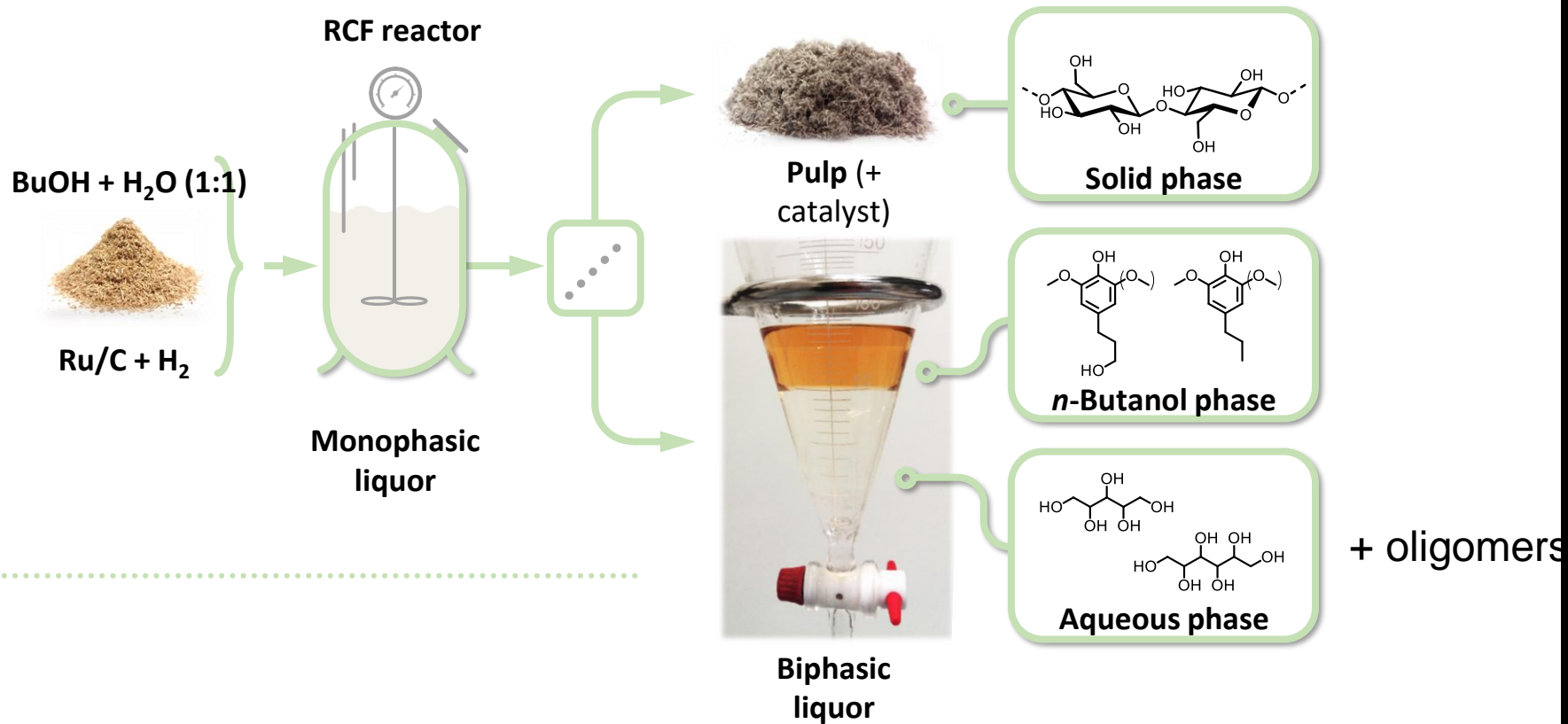
BIOCON®



# IMPACT OF SCALING ON PRODUCT PROPERTIES

One phase MeOH

Two phase BuOH-water



Process conditions (*proof-of-concept*)

200 °C 2 g eucalyptus sawdust  
 10 bar H<sub>2</sub> 0.1 g Ru/C (5 wt% metal)  
 2 h 20 mL *n*-butanol + 20 mL H<sub>2</sub>O

# IMPACT OF SCALING ON THE PRODUCT PROPERTIES

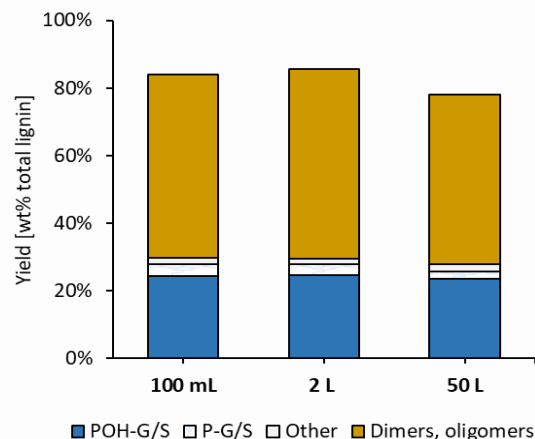


Beech



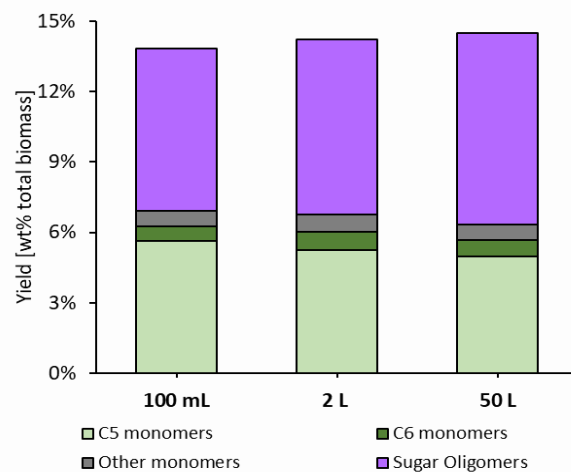
Ru/C  
200°C, 2h, 30 bar H<sub>2</sub>  
40 V% (n-butanol/water)  
40 g/L biomass, 4 g/L catalyst

**A** Lignin oil



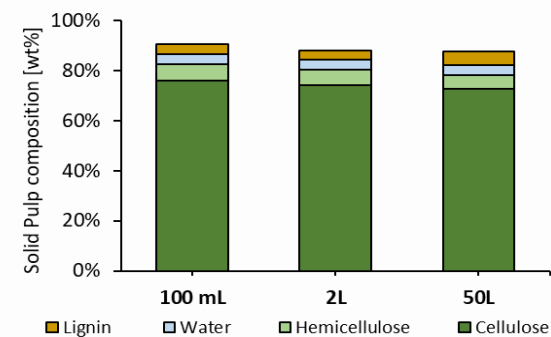
	100 mL	2L	50L
Delignification [wt% total lignin]	84	85	78
Monomer yield [wt% oil]	36	34	36
Mn	603	589	571
Mw	895	970	769
PDI	1,48	1,65	1,35
S <sub>BO4</sub> [%]	1,2	1,2	1,5
S <sub>POH</sub> [%]	82	84	85

**B** Soluble sugar products

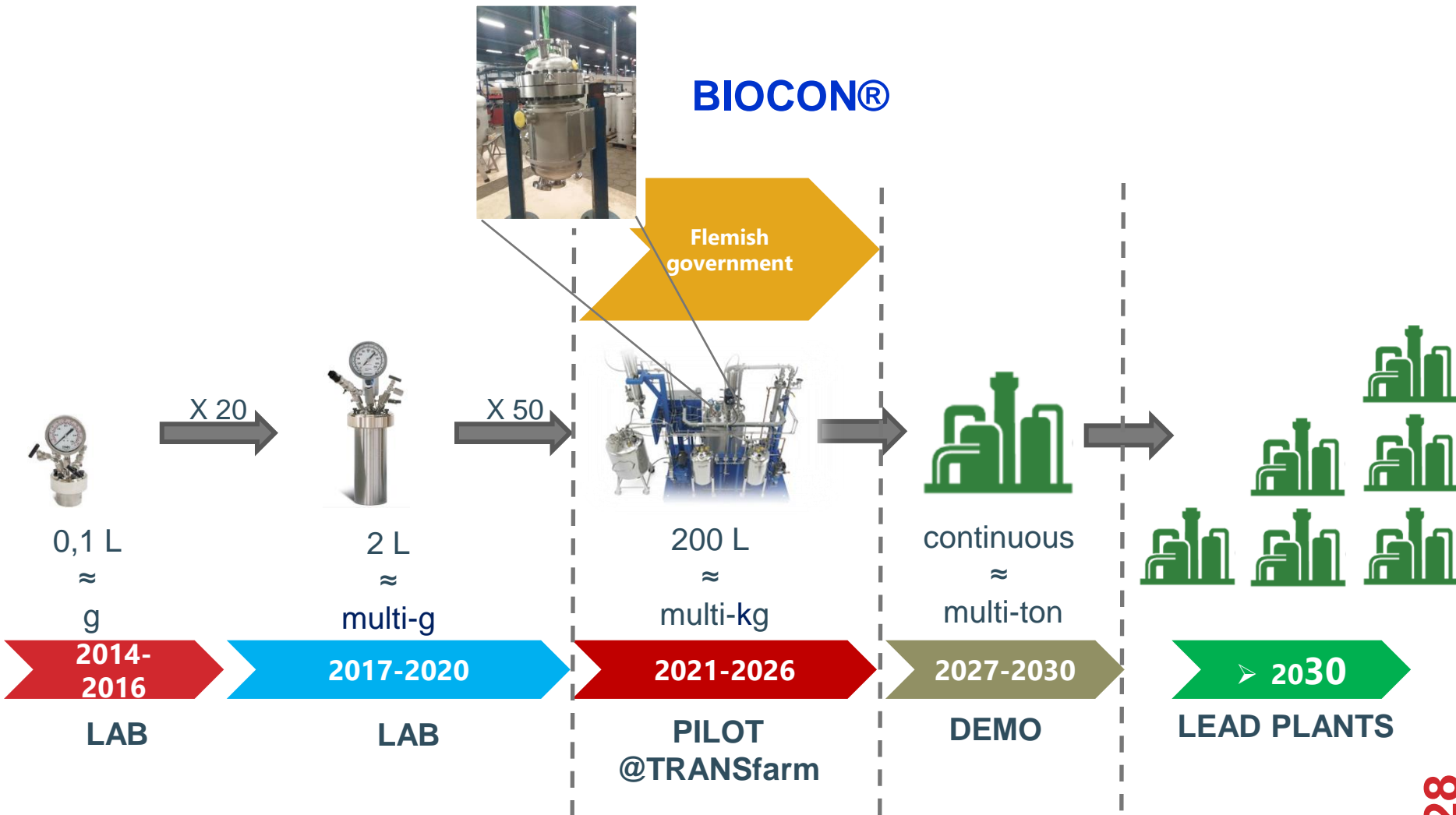


**C** Solid pulp

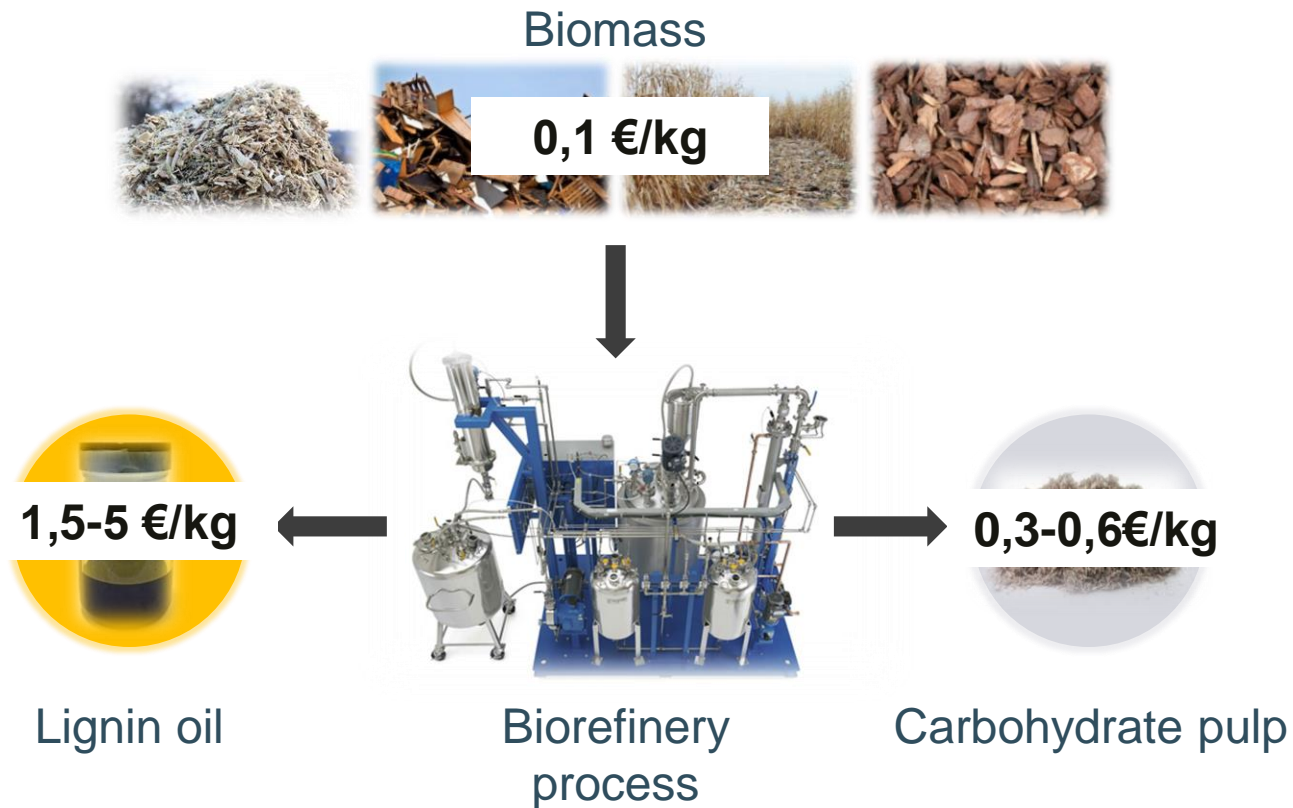
	100 mL	2L	50L
Pulp retention (wt%)	51	50	52
Sacharification (%)	93	84	74
Fermentation efficiency (%)	85	83	100



# ROADMAP LIGNIN BIOREFINERY@KULEUVEN: BIOCON®

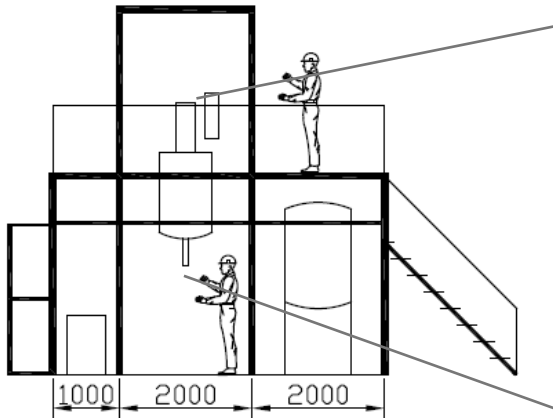


# BIOREFINERY TECHNOLOGY AT LARGE SCALE: TARGETS



**BIOCON®**

# BIOCON BIOREFINERY PILOT ON TRANSFARM SITE



Funded by the  
European Union  
NextGenerationEU



Horizon 2020  
European Union Funding  
for Research & Innovation



Identification of **challenges** in the **BIOCON®** program

**fundamental questions (conditions, catalyst, solvent)**

**reactor design**

**process: TEA & LCA**

# CHALLENGES: FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS

## BIOCON®

### FUNDAMENTAL RESEARCH QUESTIONS



#### Lignocellulose feedstock

- Logistics & handling
  - Density
  - Size
- Diffusion
  - Morphology
  - Pore structure



#### Operating pressure

- High delignification
  - Temperature
  - Solvent
- Reductive activity
  - H<sub>2</sub>-pressure
  - Hydrogen-donor



#### Redox catalyst

- Performance
  - Activity
  - Selectivity
  - Stability
- Physical recuperation



#### Solvent efficiency

- Safety
  - Auto-ignition point
- Overall usage
  - Stability
  - Recuperability

Cooreman E. *et al.* Ind Eng Chem Res. 2019

Bark ?  
(tannines, suberines)

Vangeel T *et al.* Biomass conversion & Biorefinery, 2019  
Vangeel T *et al.* Green Chemistry, 2019

Waste woods ?

(Wood variability, metal and oxide impurities, ...) Van den Bossch G. *et al.* submitted



# CHALLENGES: REACTOR DESIGN

## REACTOR DESIGN



### BATCH

Ideal mixing

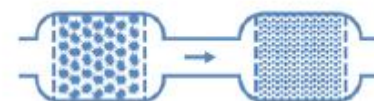
Separation biomass and catalyst

Physical stability of catalyst



Mechanical stirring

Low usage



### FLOWTHROUGH

Non-ideal flows

Separation biomass and catalyst

Physical stability of catalyst



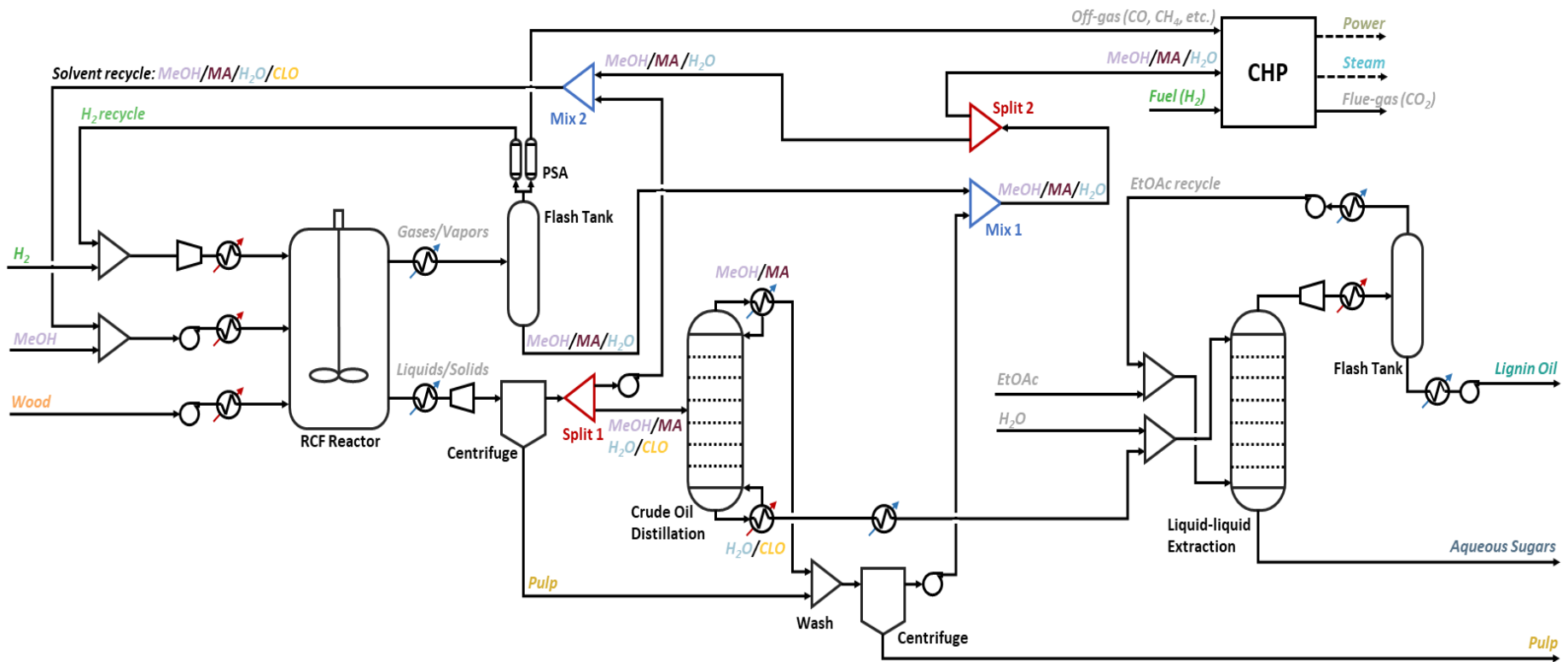
No mechanical stirring

Currently higher usage

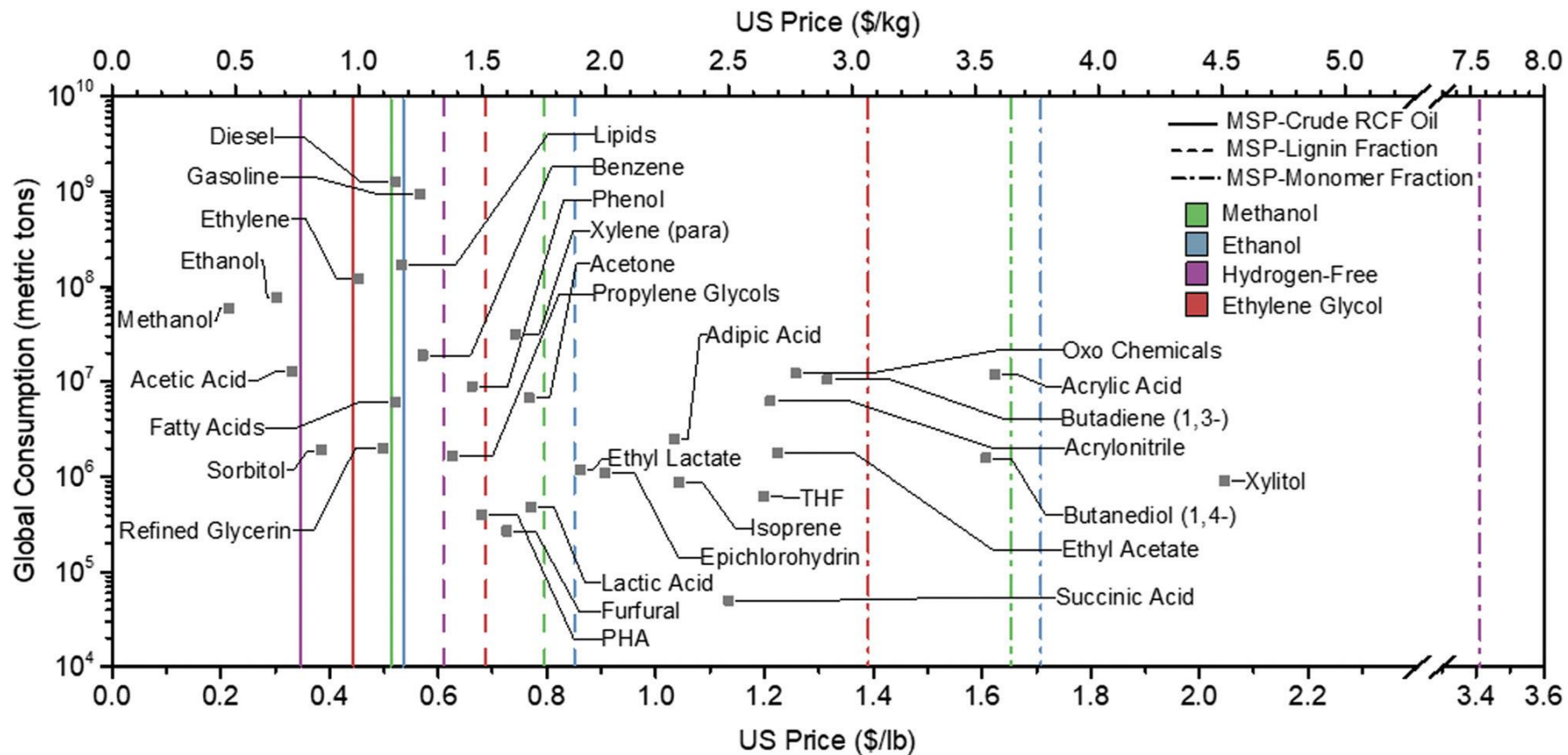


# PROCESS CHALLENGES : TEA & LCA

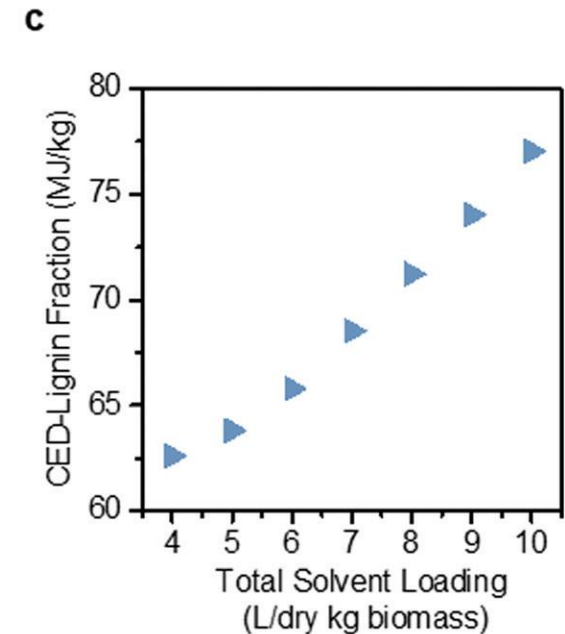
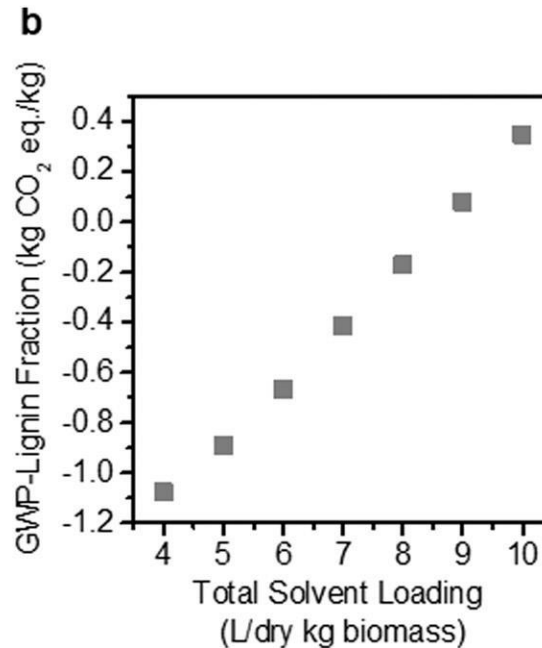
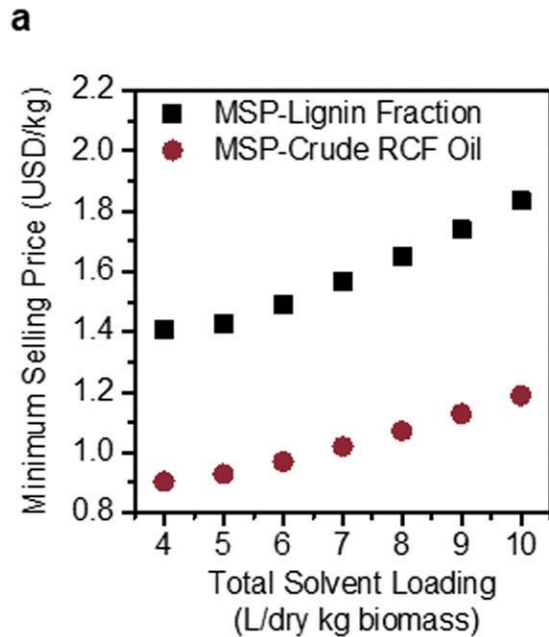
## BIOCON®



# ECONOMICS



# CO<sub>2</sub> FOOTPRINT & ECONOMICS

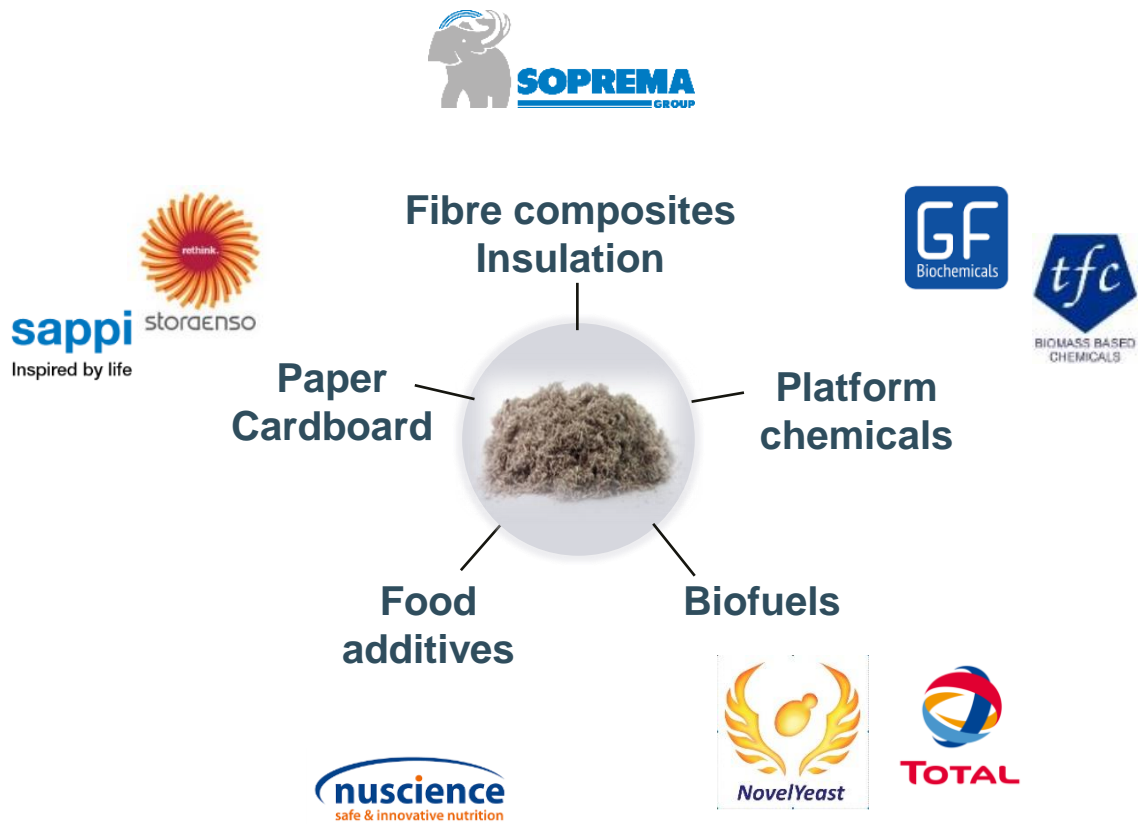


## **Holistic view** on the RCF biorefinery and **usage** of the primary products



*lignin oil & pulp:*

# PULP USAGES



# LIGNIN OIL

Resins  
PURs  
Epoxy



Flameretardents  
Antioxidants  
Plasticizers  
Emulsifiers  
...

Aromatic  
Polymers

Functional  
additives



Biolubricants **oleon**

(di)Phenol  
alkylphenols

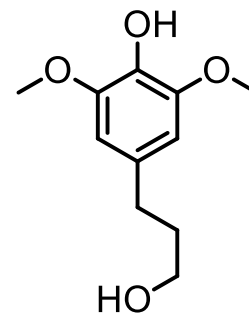
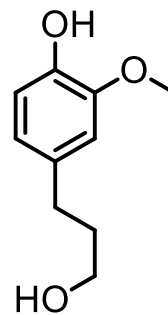
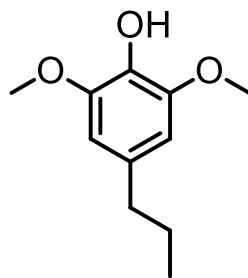
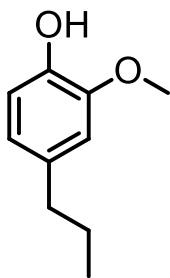
Bioactive  
compounds



Phenols  
Bisphenols



## Examples of applications with **monomers**





# New chemical example 1: bisphenols

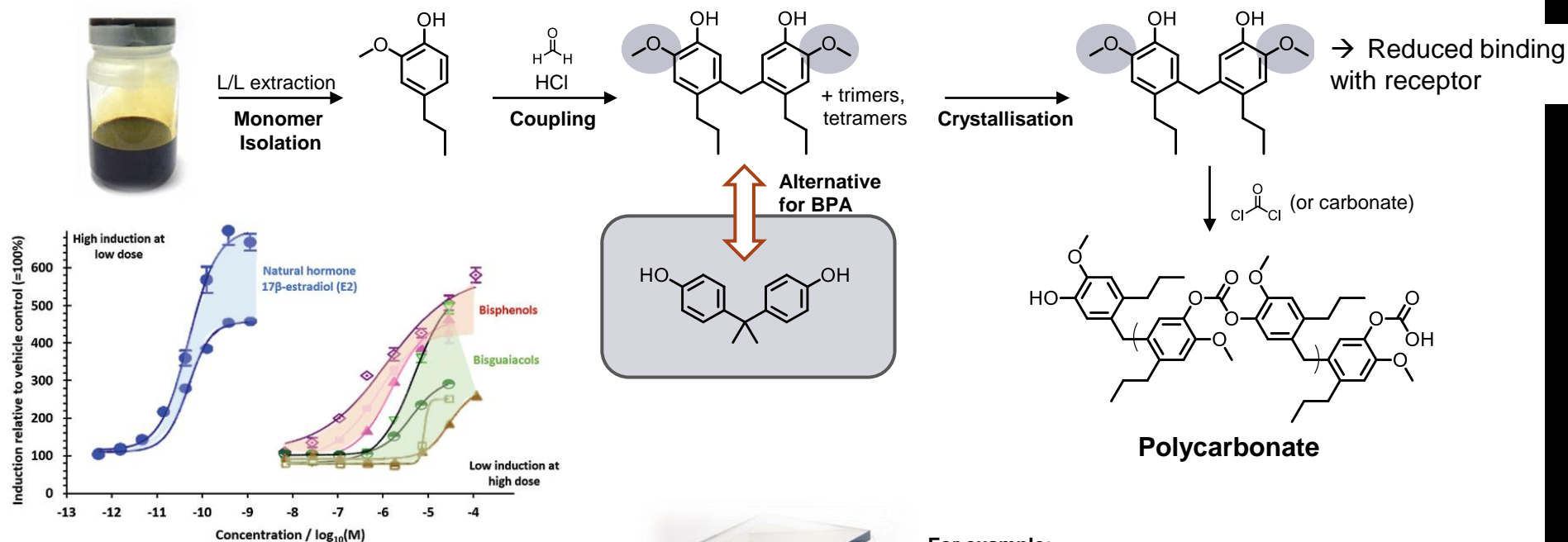


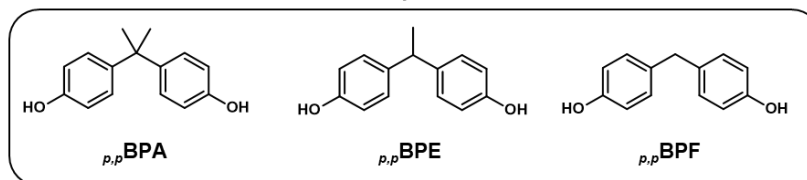
Fig. 3 *In vitro* screening of the estrogenic potency of bis(4-alkylguaiaicol)s via an estrogen-responsive reporter assay in human MCF-7 cells (MELN assay). Three zones of sigmoidal responsiveness are indicated for reference estrogen (blue), commercial bisphenols (magenta) and bisguaiacols (green). The individual test compounds: E2 (blue, ●), BPF (dark mag., ◇), BPA (light mag., ◻), BPE (mag., ▲), 4-methyl- (light green, ▽), 4-ethyl- (dark green, ●), 4-*n*-propyl- (light brown, □) and 5-methyl- (dark brown, ▲) bisguaiacols.

Koelewijn, S.-F. *et al. Green. Chem.* 19, 2561-2570 (2017)  
 Koelewijn, S.-F. *et al. Green. Chem.* 20, 1050-1058 (2018)  
 Trulleman *et al. Polymer Chemistry* 2021 (online)

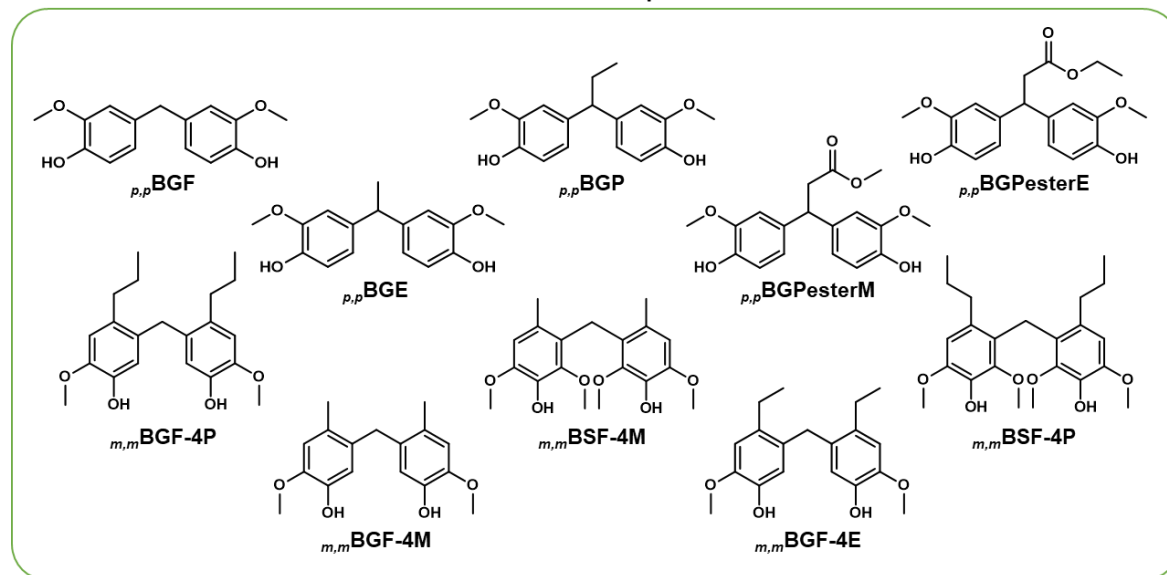
# New chemical example 1: safer bisphenols platform



## Industrial bisphenols – EDC's



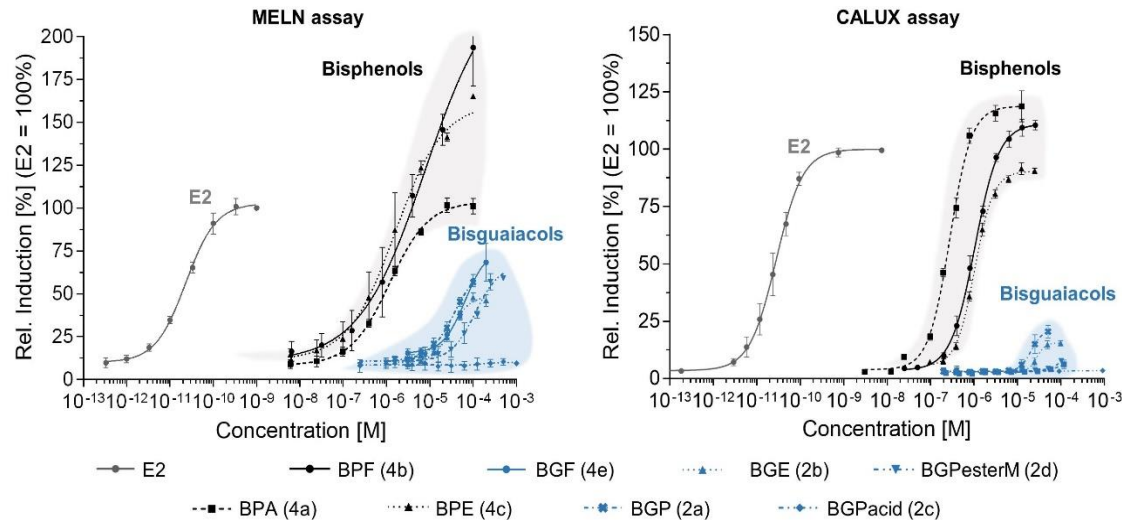
## Safer bio-based bisphenols



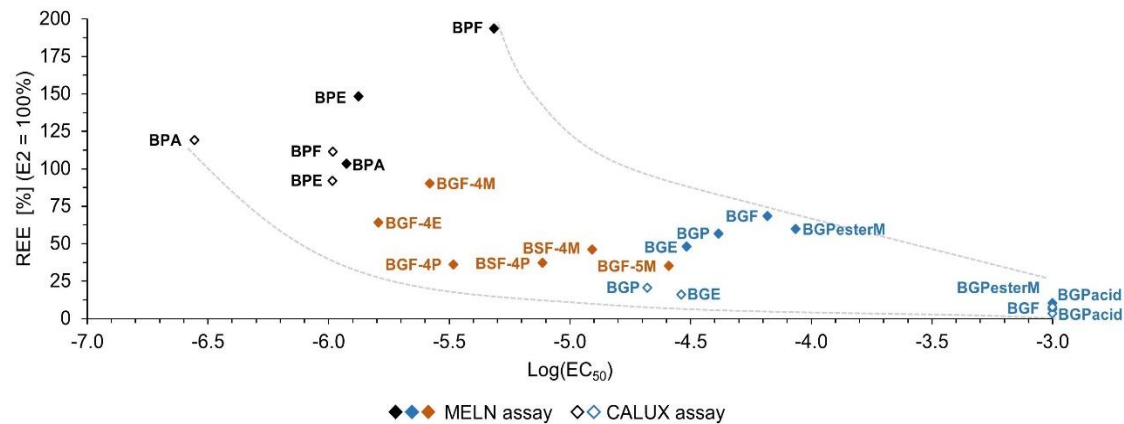
## Bisphenol platform

# NEW CHEMICAL EXAMPLE 1: SAFER BISPHENOLS PLATFORM

**a** Concentration - response curves

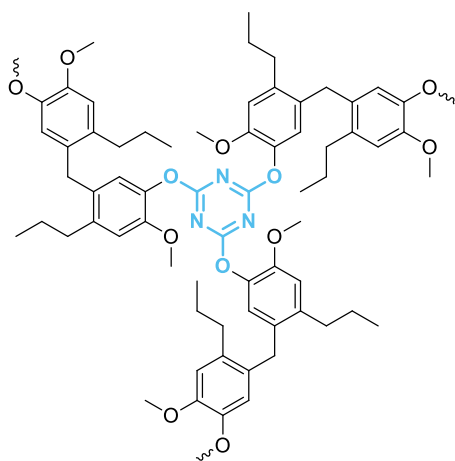


**b** Potency (Log(EC<sub>50</sub>)) and efficacy (REE)

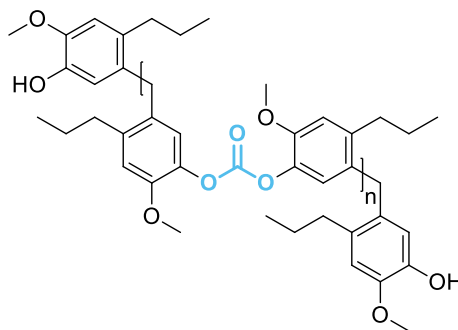


# New chemical example 1: bisphenols

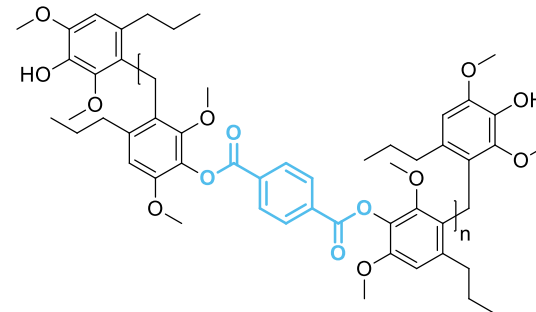
## cyanate ester resins



## polycarbonates

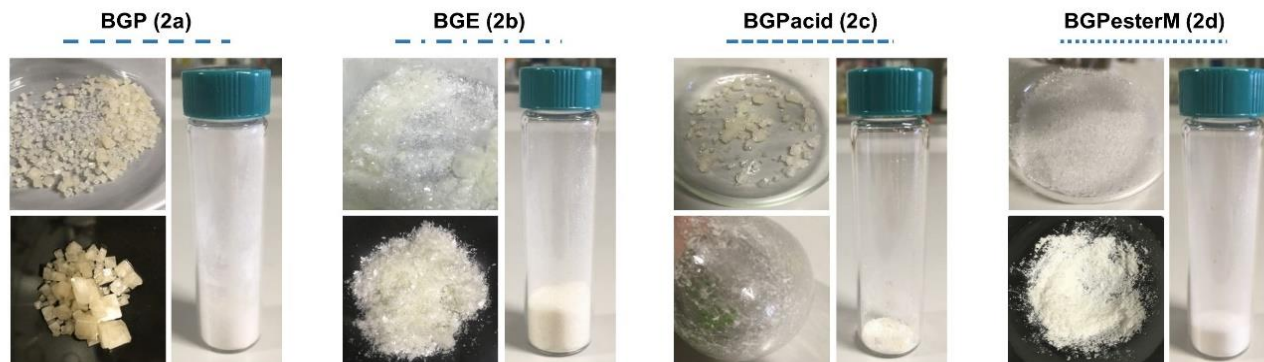


## polyesters

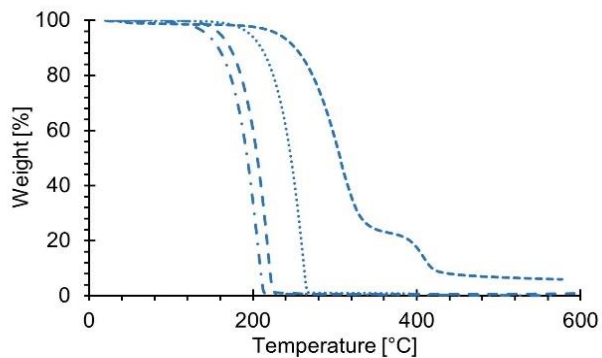


# New chemical example 1: bisphenols

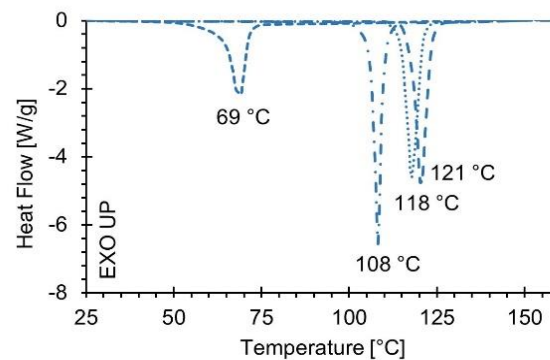
## a Physical appearance - bisguaiacols



## b Thermal stability (TGA)



## c Melting point (DSC)



## d 2a-PT



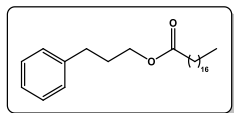
## e 2a-PC



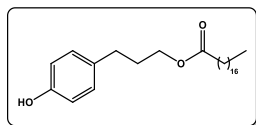
## f 2a-ER



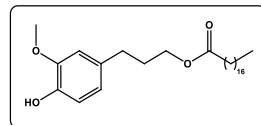
# NEW CHEMICAL EXAMPLE 2: GUAIACOL AND SYRINGOL ESTERS - PLASTICIZERS



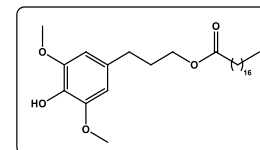
**PDL1**  
M.W. = 402,66  
Yield: 68%



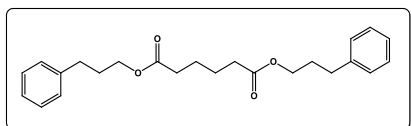
**PDL4**  
M.W. = 418,66  
Yield: 72%



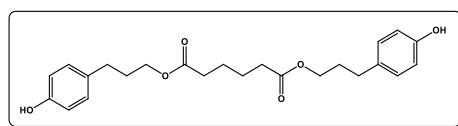
**PDL5**  
M.W. = 448,69  
Yield: 76%



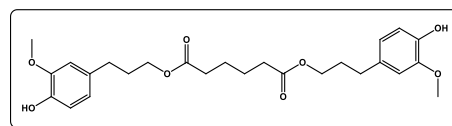
**PDL6**  
M.W. = 478,71  
Yield: 50%



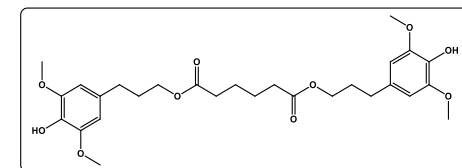
**PDL7**  
M.W. = 382,50  
Yield: 77%



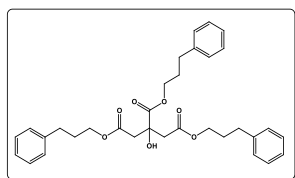
**PDL8**  
M.W. = 414,50  
Yield: 88%



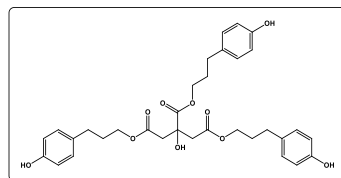
**PDL9**  
M.W. = 474,55  
Yield: 83%



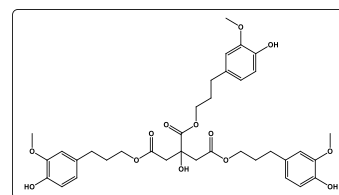
**PDL10**  
M.W. = 534,60  
Yield: 44%



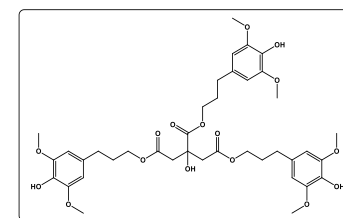
**PDL11**  
M.W. = 546,66  
Yield: 80%



**PDL12**  
M.W. = 594,66  
Yield: 88%

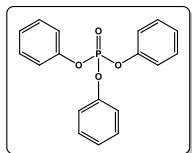


**PDL13**  
M.W. = 684,74  
Yield: 68%

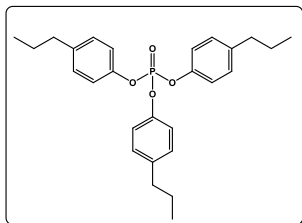


**PDL14**  
M.W. = 774,81  
Yield: 57%

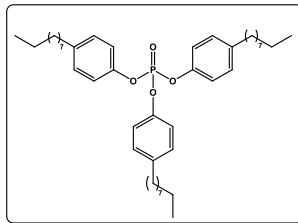
# NEW CHEMICAL EXAMPLE 2: GUAIACOL AND SYRINGOL PHOSPHATES - FLAMERETARDENTS

**P3OP**

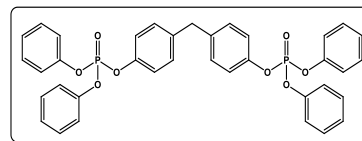
Commercial sample

**JN002-9**

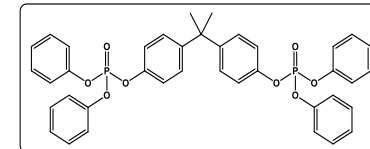
Yield: 51%

**JN011**

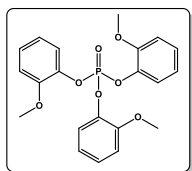
Yield: 71%

**SCD314**

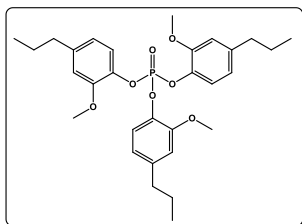
Yield: 96%

**SCD315**

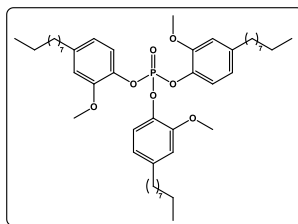
Yield: 94%

**G3OP**

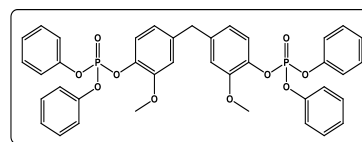
Yield: 92%

**SCD296**

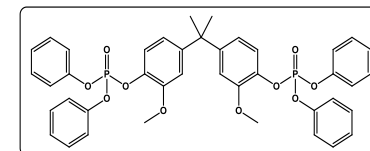
Yield: 91%

**JN022**

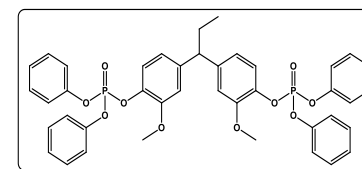
Yield: 32%

**SCD316**

Yield: 93%

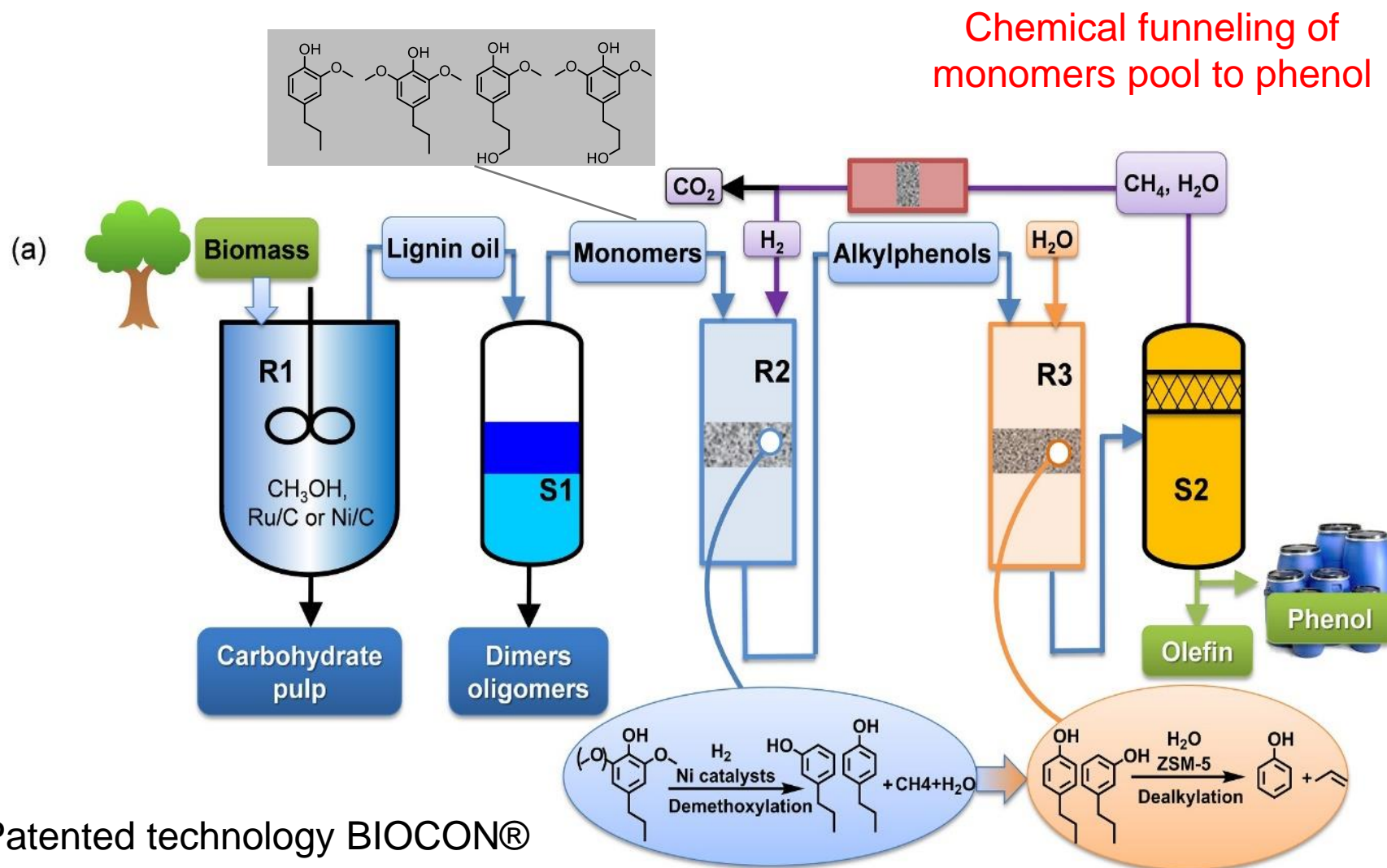
**JN007**

Yield: 80%

**JN003**

Yield: 83%

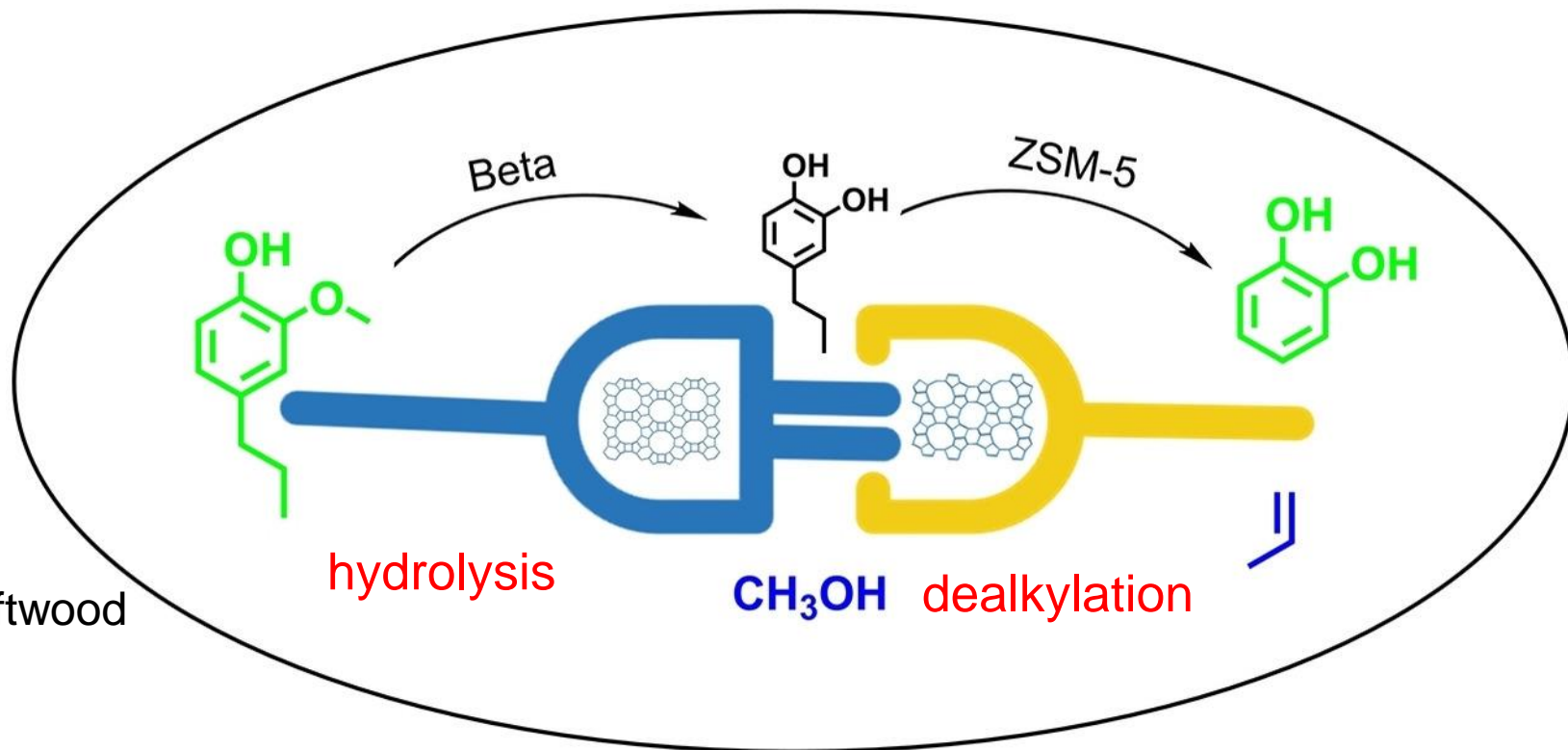
# Drop-in chemicals example 2: Phenol



Patented technology BIOCON®



# Drop-in chemicals example 3: Catechol

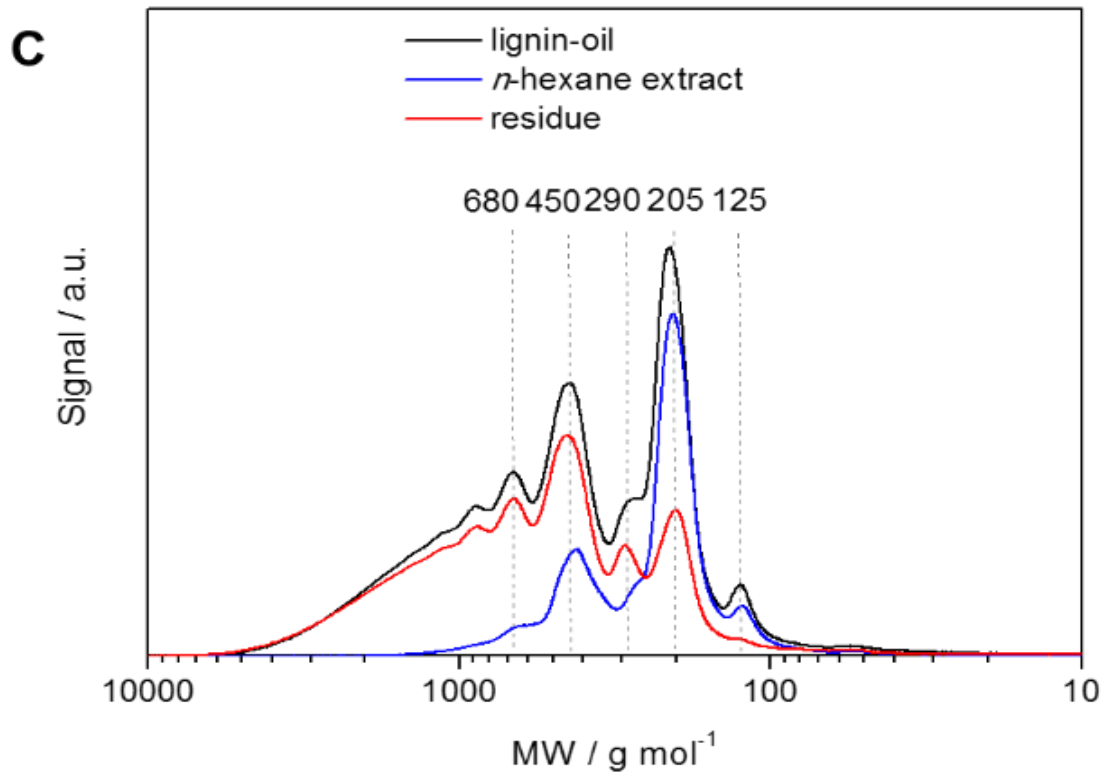


What about utilizing the **oligomers** ?

**molecular understanding of the chemistry**

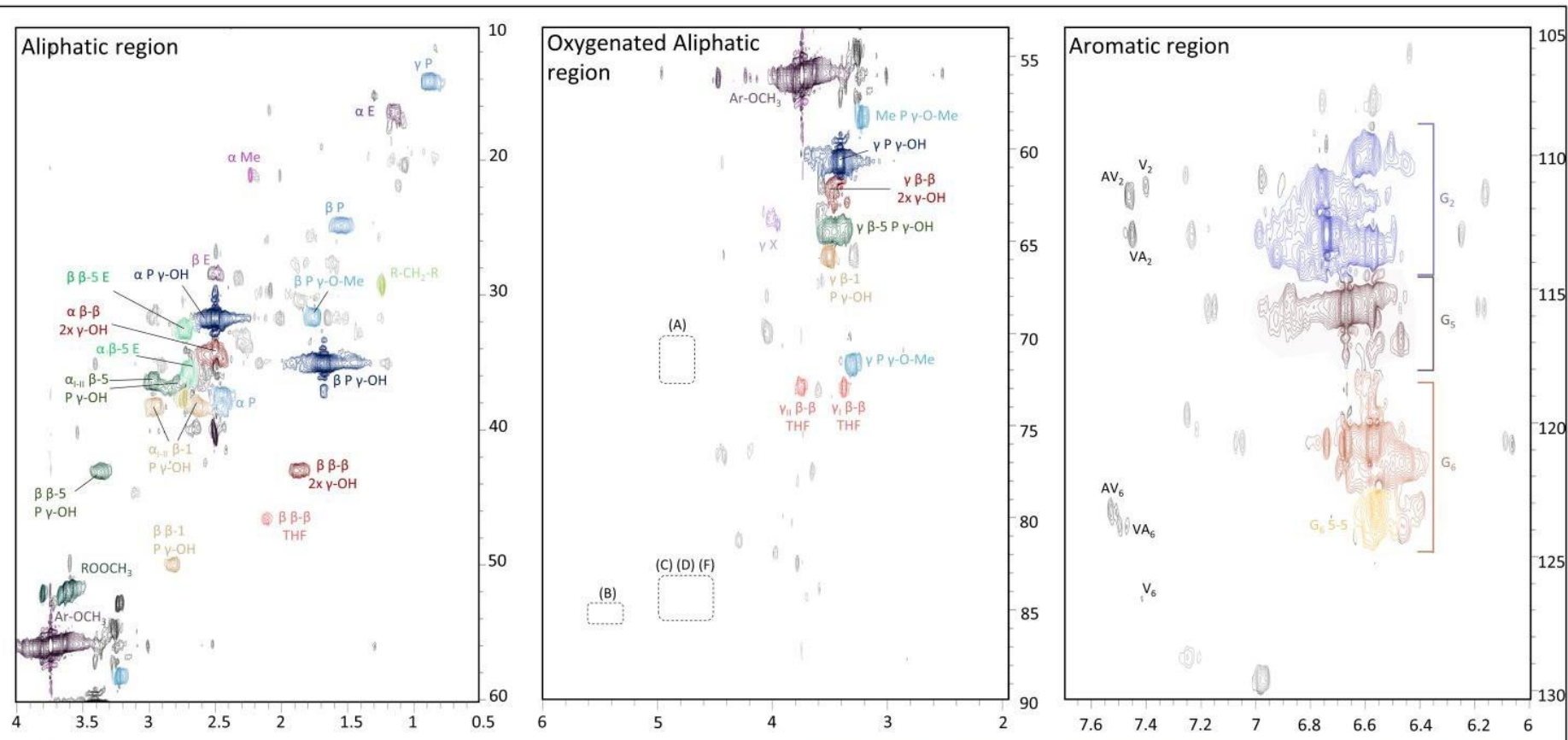
**design towards applications**

# MOLECULAR WEIGHT DISTRIBUTION USING GPC



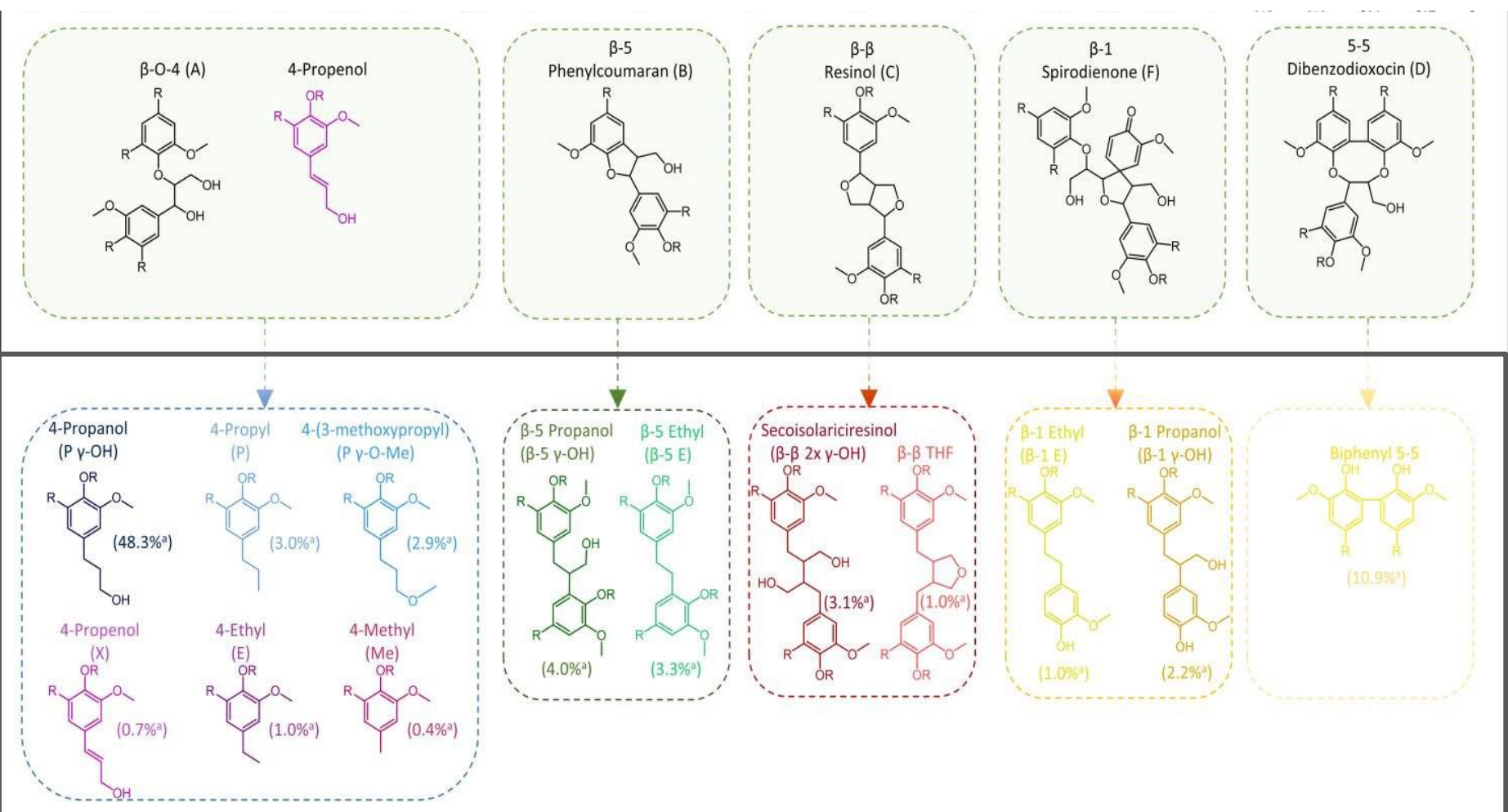
$M_w$   
 $M_n$   
D

# MOLECULAR INSIGHT INTO THE OLIGOMER STRUCTURE : 2D HSQC NMR



# LIGNIN OIL OLIGOMER FUNCTIONALITY AND MOLECULAR STRUCTURES

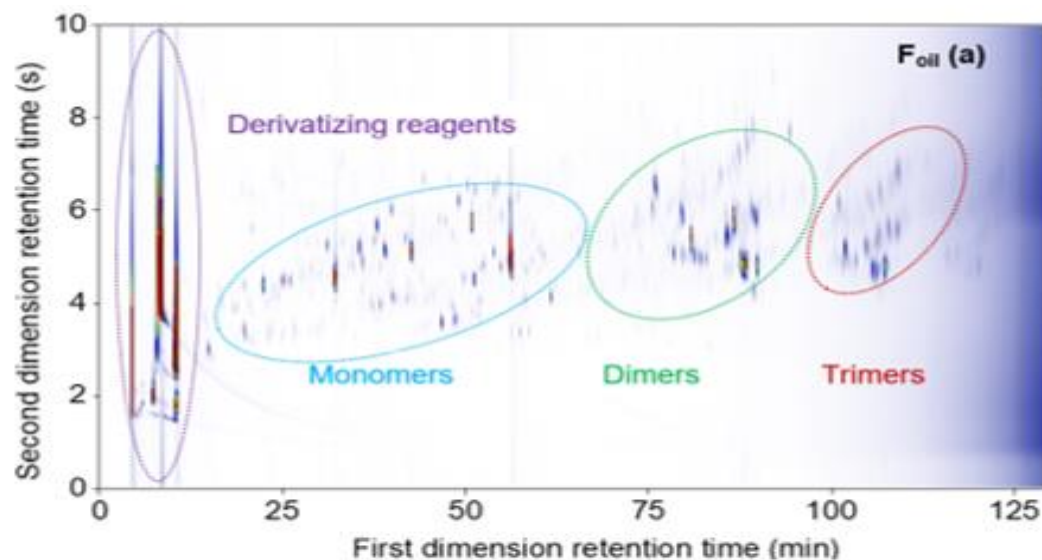
> 80% interlinkages and end groups were recently identified



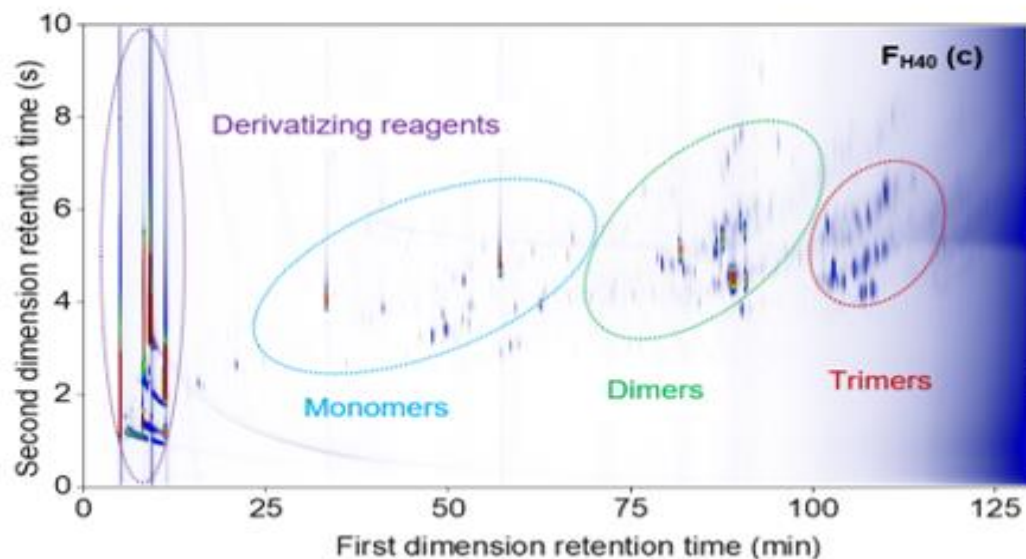
# LIGNIN OIL OLIGOMERS MOLECULES IDENTIFICATION: HT-GCXGC-MS/FID

*K. Van Geem University Ghent*

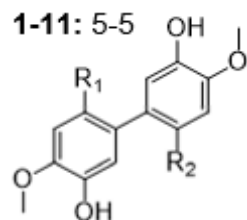
Lignin Oil



Oligomer  
fraction

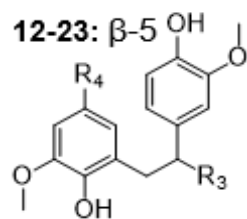


# ILLUSTRATION OF IDENTIFIED DIMERS



- 1:  $R_1 = \text{CH}_3$ ;  $R_2 = (\text{CH}_2)_2\text{CH}_2\text{OH}$   
 2:  $R_1 = R_2 = (\text{CH}_2)_2\text{CH}_2\text{OH}$   
 3:  $R_1 = (\text{CH}_2)_2\text{CH}_3$ ;  $R_2 = (\text{CH}_2)_2\text{CH}_2\text{OCH}_3$   
 4:  $R_1 = \text{CH}_2\text{CH}_3$ ;  $R_2 = (\text{CH}_2)_2\text{CH}_2\text{OH}$   
 5:  $R_1 = (\text{CH}_2)_2\text{CH}_2\text{OCH}_3$ ;  $R_2 = (\text{CH}_2)_2\text{CH}_2\text{OCH}_3$   
 6:  $R_1 = (\text{CH}_2)_2\text{CH}_3$ ;  $R_2 = \text{CH}_2\text{CH}_3$

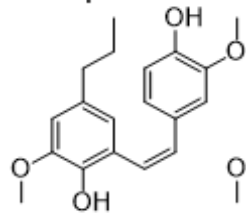
- 7:  $R_1 = R_2 = (\text{CH}_2)_2\text{CH}_3$   
 8:  $R_1 = (\text{CH}_2)_2\text{CH}_3$ ;  $R_2 = (\text{CH}_2)_2\text{CH}_2\text{OH}$   
 9:  $R_1 = R_2 = \text{CH}_2\text{CH}_3$   
 10:  $R_1 = \text{CH}_2\text{CH}_3$ ;  $R_2 = \text{CH}_3$   
 11:  $R_1 = (\text{CH}_2)_2\text{CH}_2\text{OH}$ ;  $R_2 = (\text{CH}_2)_2\text{CH}_2\text{OH}$



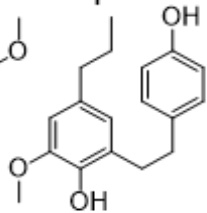
- 12:  $R_3 = \text{CH}_2\text{OH}$ ;  $R_4 = (\text{CH}_2)_2\text{CH}_3$   
 13:  $R_3 = \text{CH}_2\text{OH}$ ;  $R_4 = (\text{CH}_2)_2\text{CH}_2\text{OH}$   
 14:  $R_3 = \text{CH}_2\text{OH}$ ;  $R_4 = \text{CH}_3$   
 15:  $R_3 = R_4 = \text{H}$   
 16:  $R_3 = \text{CH}_3$ ;  $R_4 = (\text{CH}_2)_2\text{CH}_2\text{OH}$   
 17:  $R_3 = \text{CH}_2\text{OH}$ ;  $R_4 = (\text{CH}_2)_2\text{CH}_2\text{OCH}_3$

- 18:  $R_3 = \text{H}$ ;  $R_4 = (\text{CH}_2)_2\text{CH}_3$   
 19:  $R_3 = \text{CH}_3\text{OH}$ ;  $R_4 = \text{CH}_2\text{CH}_3$   
 20:  $R_3 = \text{H}$ ;  $R_4 = (\text{CH}_2)_2\text{CH}_2\text{OH}$   
 21:  $R_3 = \text{CH}_3$ ;  $R_4 = (\text{CH}_2)_2\text{CH}_2\text{OCH}_3$   
 22:  $R_3 = \text{H}$ ;  $R_4 = (\text{CH}_2)_2\text{CH}_2\text{OCH}_3$   
 23:  $R_3 = \text{CH}_3$ ;  $R_4 = (\text{CH}_2)_2\text{CH}_3$

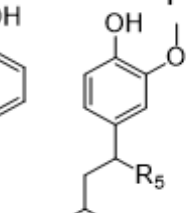
**24:  $\beta$ -5**



**25:  $\beta$ -5**

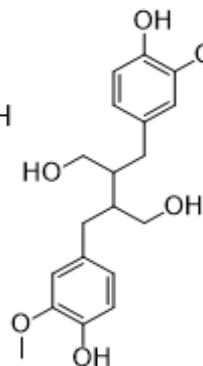


**26-28:  $\beta$ -1**

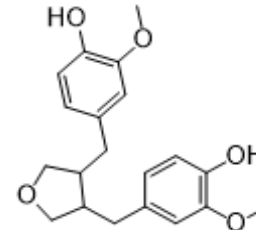


- 26:  $R_5 = \text{CH}_3$   
 27:  $R_5 = \text{H}$   
 28:  $R_5 = \text{CH}_2\text{OH}$

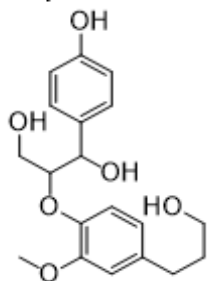
**29:  $\beta$ - $\beta$**



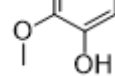
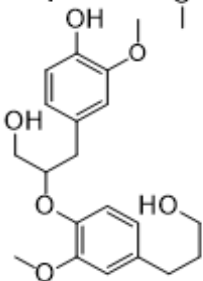
**30:  $\beta$ - $\beta$**



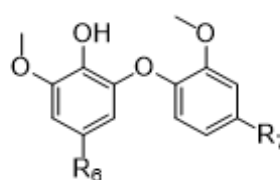
**31:  $\beta$ -O-4**



**32:  $\beta$ -O-4**

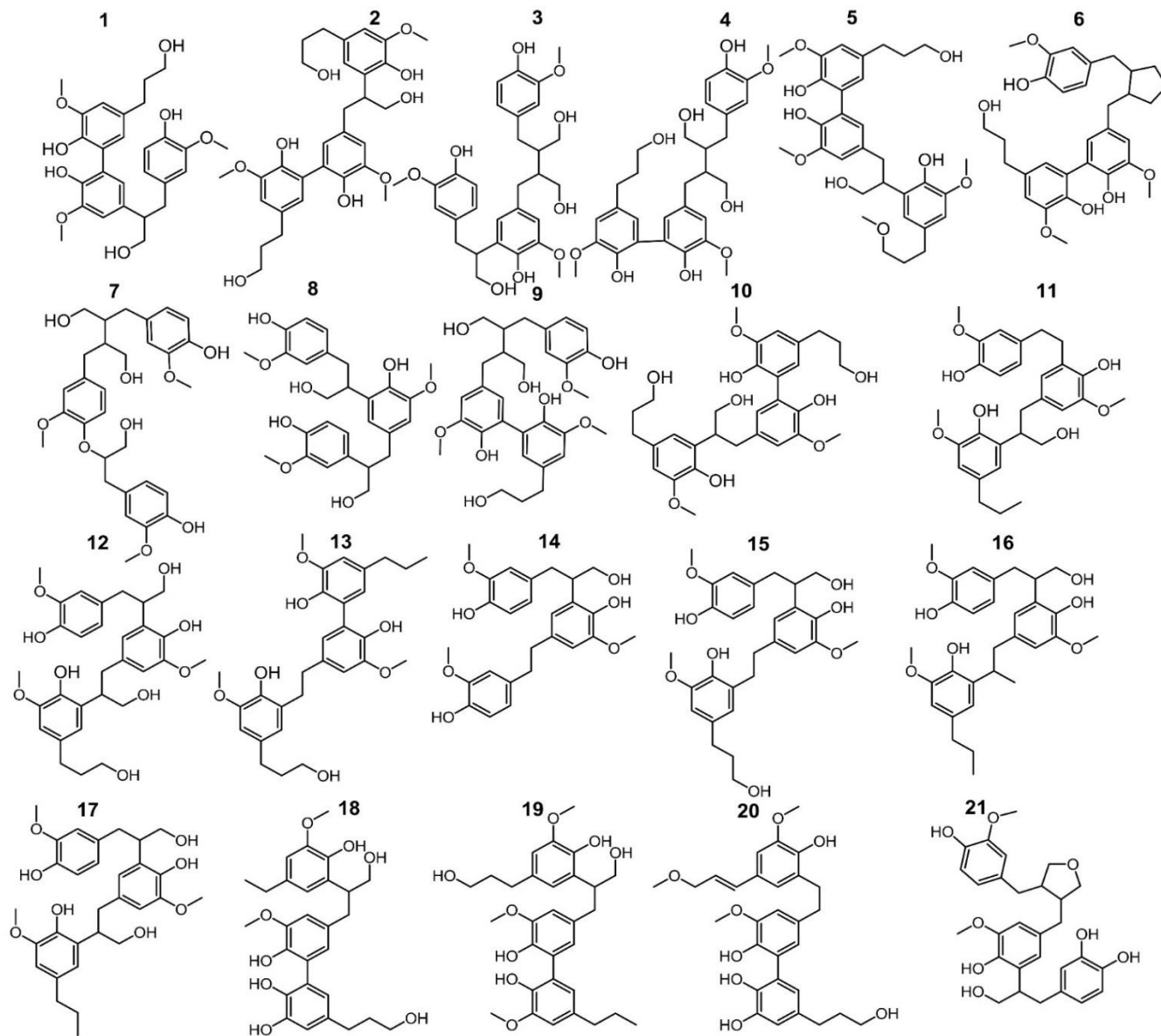


**33-36: 4-O-5**



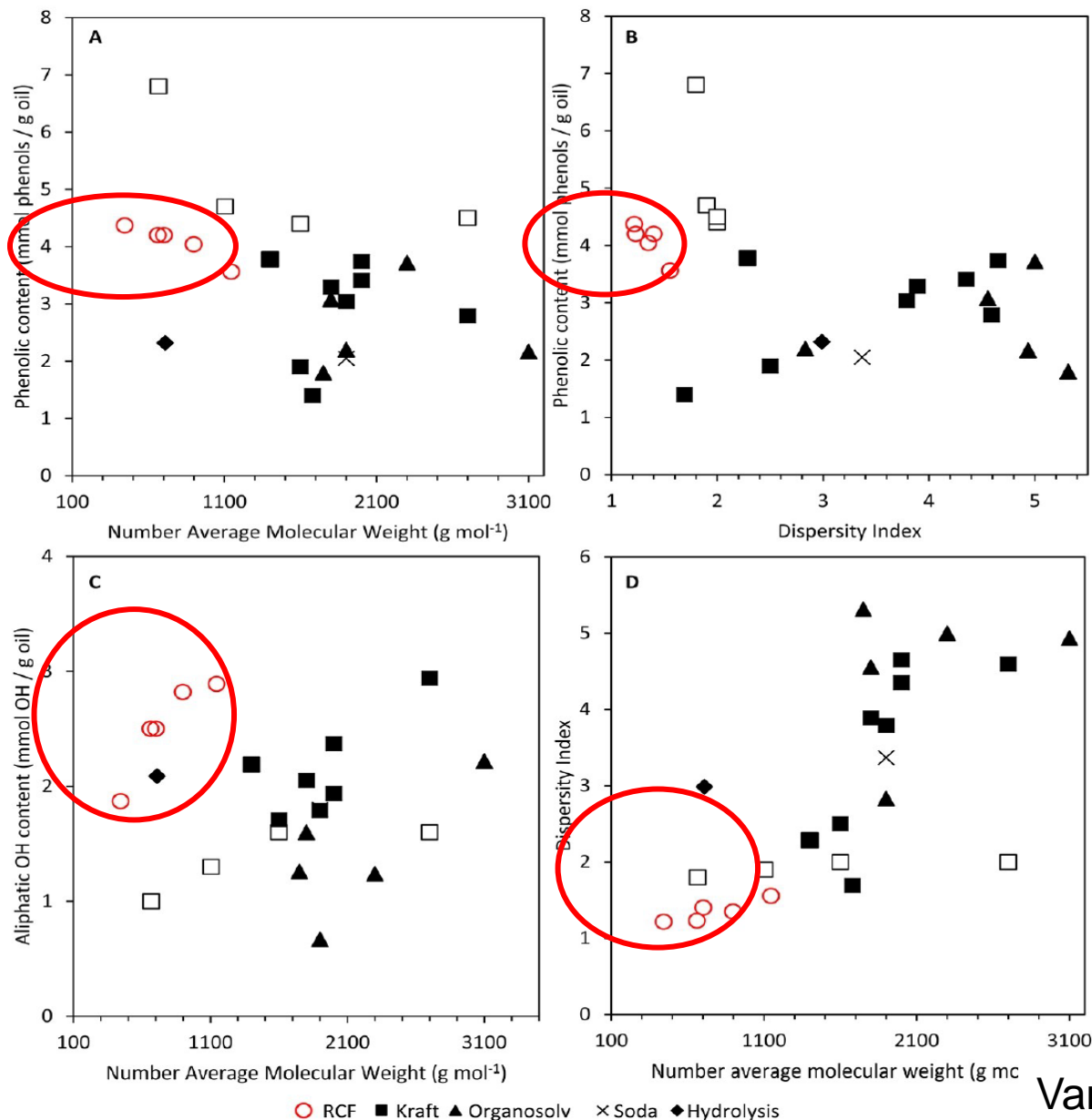
- 33 & 34:  $R_6 = R_7 = (\text{CH}_2)_2\text{CH}_2\text{OH}$   
 35:  $R_6 = (\text{CH}_2)_2\text{CH}_2\text{OCH}_3$ ;  $R_7 = (\text{CH}_2)_2\text{CH}_2\text{OCH}_3$   
 36:  $R_6 = (\text{CH}_2)_2\text{CH}_3$ ;  $R_7 = (\text{CH}_2)_2\text{CH}_2\text{OH}$

# ILLUSTRATION OF IDENTIFIED TRIMERS



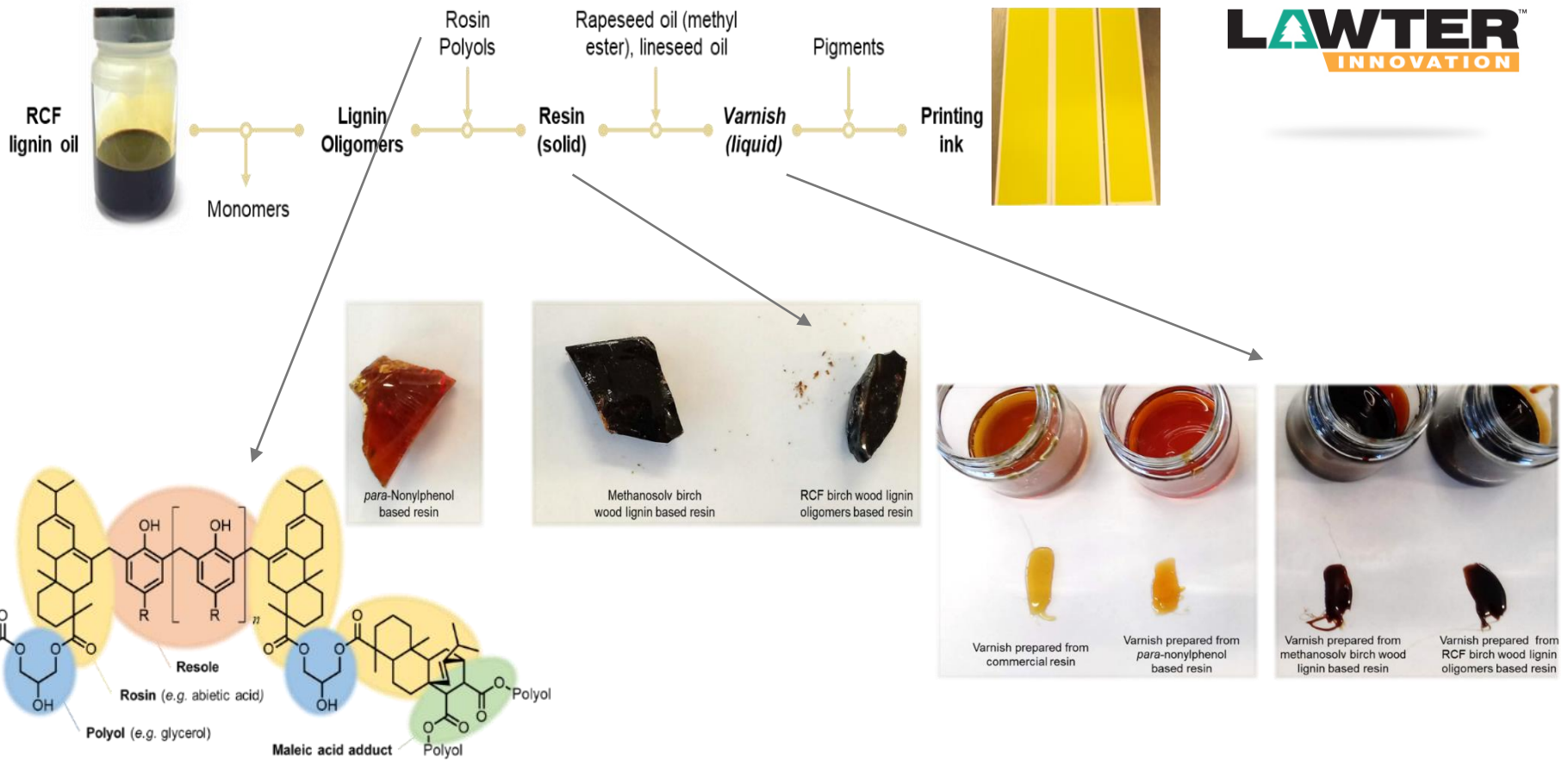


# RCF LIGNIN OILS COMPOSITION POSITIONS UNIQUE FEATURES FOR VARIOUS APPLICATIONS



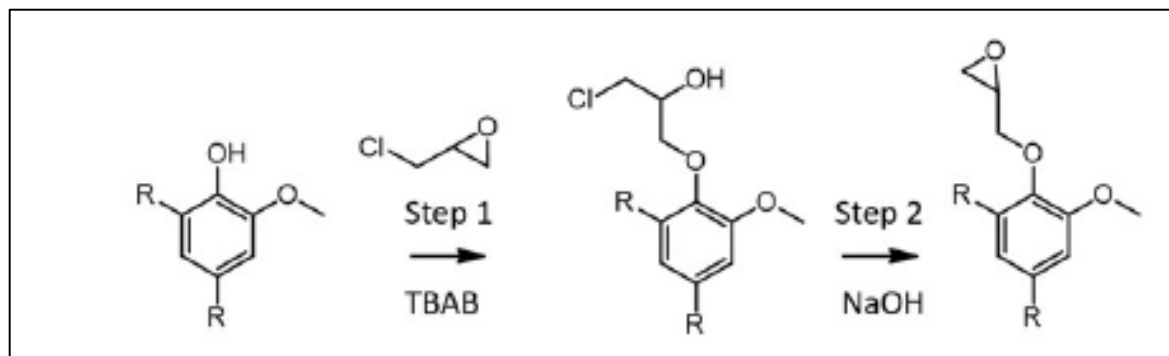
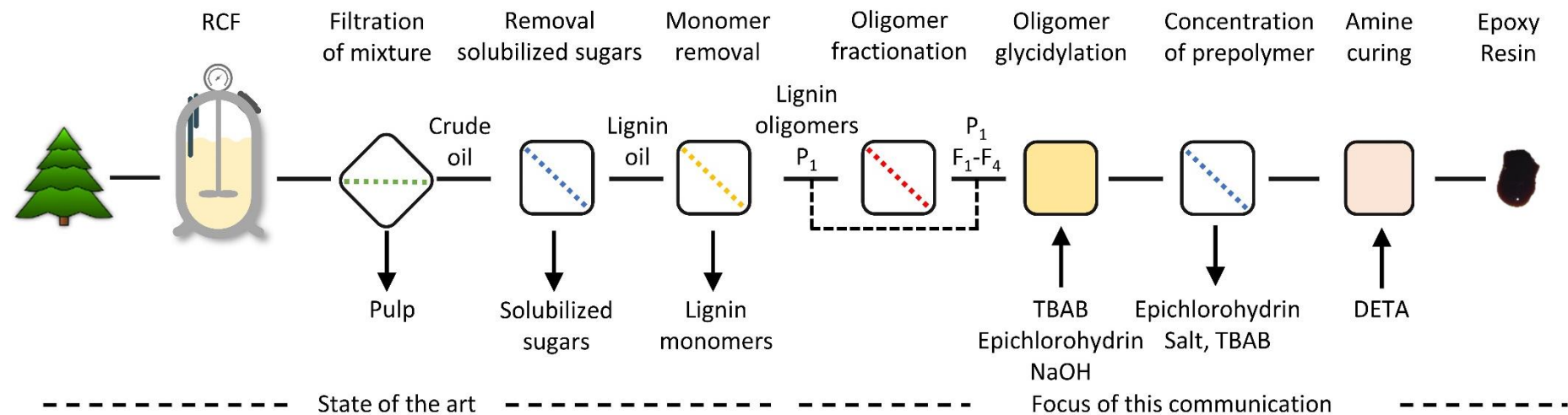
Low dispersity D  
Low molecular weight  
MW  
High functionality  
(aliphatic OH)

# EXAMPLE 1: LIGNIN OIL OLIGOMERS TO RESINS, VARNISHES AND PRINTING INK



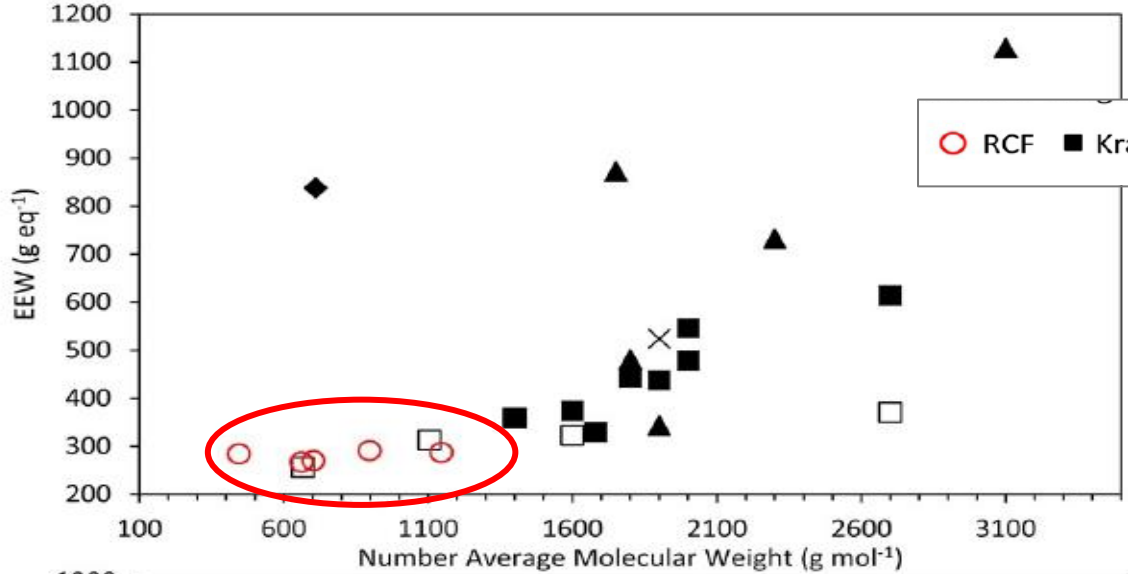
Replacing **endocrine nonylphenol** oligomers

# EXAMPLE 2: LIGNIN OIL OLIGOMERS TO EPOXY RESINS, PURS, ...

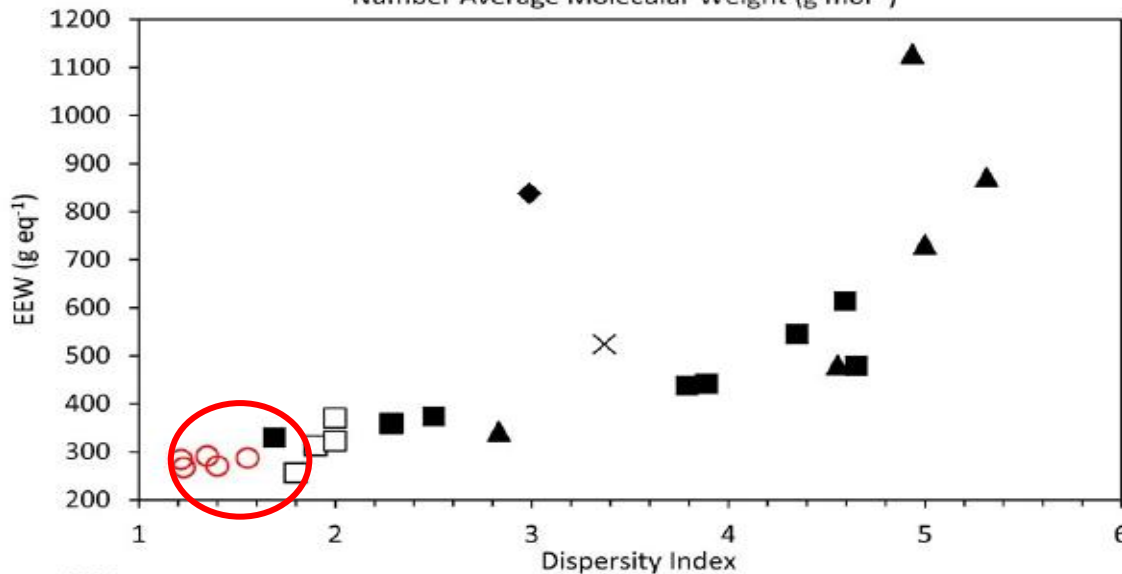


? Functionalisation of phenols or aliphatic OHs

# EXAMPLE 2: LIGNIN OIL OLIGOMERS TO EPOXY RESINS – HIGH EPOXIDE CONTENT

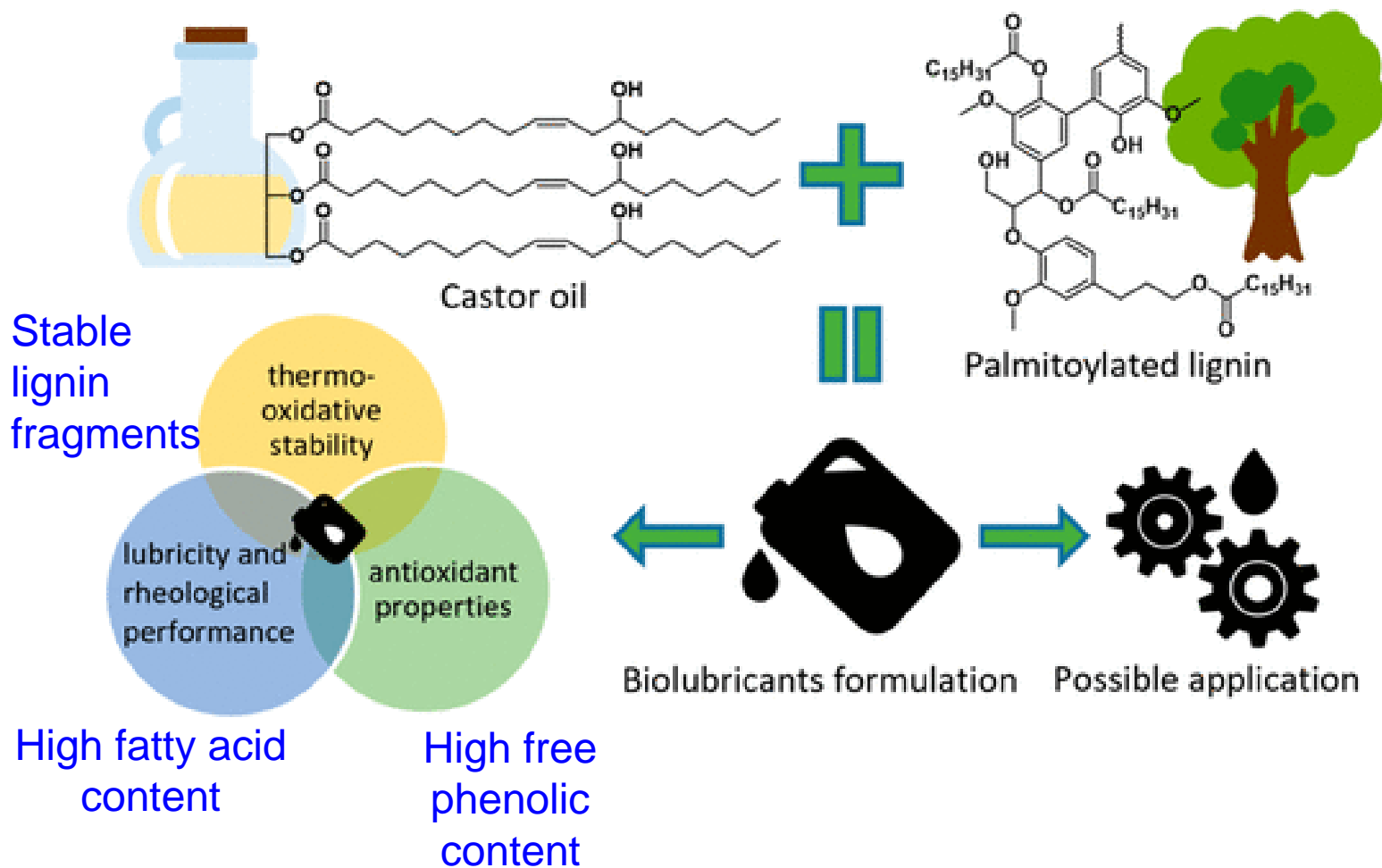


High EEW value due to high OH (phenolic + aliphatic) content  
High degree of crosslinking



# EXAMPLE 3: LIGNIN OIL OLIGOMERS TO BIOLUBRICANTS

With K. Bernaerts University Maastricht



# TAKE HOME MESSAGES

---

Lignin is still **exciting research** domain

Lignin is a biomass feedstock. Its usage can add to the **sustainability goals**

Lignin has large potential due to

- Better **molecular understanding**

- Development of **new biorefineries** producing novel lignins

- That is capable of **tailoring lignin properties**

Ready for **upscaling** adventures

Integration in **chemical industry** as at the doorstep

Validate **process-technical**, **economical** and **sustainability** measures

# CURRENT RESEARCH GROUP

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Dieter Plessers (FWO)  
Ghinwa Fayad  
Korneel Van Aelst  
Francesco Brandi  
Deepak Raikwar

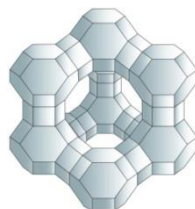


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Werner Wouters  
Johan Maes



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Simon Verstraeten

