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Herbalife India and IIT-M sign agreement to establish India's first CoE on plant cell fermentation

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CoE is expected to commence its operations from June 2026

Herbalife International India and the Indian Institute of Technology Madras (IIT-M) have signed a pioneering agreement to establish the Herbalife–IIT Madras Centre of Excellence (CoE) on Plant Cell Fermentation Technology at IIT Madras Research Park, marking India's first-of-its-kind exclusive facility dedicated to cutting-edge translational R&D on plant cell-based fermentation.

This pioneering initiative is a part of their continued collaboration (Phase 2) with IIT Madras and is funded through Herbalife India's CSR program. It aims to create a world-class Centre for promoting R&D, innovation and entrepreneurship on sustainable production of herbal biomass, enriched herbal extracts and high-value phytochemicals.

The CoE will focus on plant cell fermentation technology for the sustainable and scalable production of herbal biomass enriched with its high-value phytochemicals for applications in human health and wellness. By integrating advanced and customised upstream cultivation systems with state-of-the-art downstream processing and metabolomics platforms, the centre will enable capacity building, tech-transfer to Industry and entrepreneurship in this niche domain.

The facility will house the state-of-the-art equipment, dedicated and designed for plant cell fermentation technology.

The CoE will benefit a wide range of stakeholders including students, researchers, industry professionals and entrepreneurs in the herbal product sectors. The expected outcomes include establishment of national and international academic-industry R&D partnerships, skill development via student and faculty exchanges, IP creation, technology transfers to Industry and start-ups as spin-offs.

Commenting on the partnership, Ajay Khanna, Managing Director, Herbalife India said, “The development and large-scale production of plant-based ingredients is being revolutionised by technologies such as plant cell fermentation. We aim to strengthen scientific capacity and facilitate more robust industry-academia collaborations in this field through our partnership with Indian Institute of Technology Madras. We believe that this initiative will help shape India's role in the future of bio-based manufacturing while enhancing quality, consistency, and long-term sustainability in the wellness sector.”

Speaking on the partnership, Prof Ashwin Mahalingam, Dean – Alumni and Corporate Relations at IIT Madras said, “It is encouraging to witness the next phase of collaboration between Indian Institute of Technology Madras and Herbalife. This initiative is a meaningful step towards strengthening India’s presence, across the globe, in the field of commercial plant cell fermentation. With a strong focus on facilitating this research beyond the lab and converting it into scalable, real-world solutions, the Centre of Excellence will support the development of high-quality, sustainable plant-derived products. We truly appreciate Herbalife’s continued support in moving this important area of innovation forward.”

Once operational, the centre is expected to play a transformative role in enabling environmentally sustainable production of high-quality plant biomass and its phytochemicals, improving access to high-quality, green, and sustainable solutions for human health and wellness.

The CoE is expected to commence its operations from June, 2026, advancing India's capabilities in commercial plant cell fermentation, while addressing growing demand for high-quality, sustainable plant-derived healthcare products with relatively low-cost indigenous technologies and reduced import dependencies.