

# Position

Brussels, 21 June 2021

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## European seed sector roadmap for a European protein plan

### EU aims to ramp up its domestic protein production

Plants sourced protein is an indispensable component of animal nutrition and plays an ever-increasing role in human nutrition due to changing dietary habits more focused on plant-based diets. The domestic production of protein from plants prevents climate-damaging land use change, lowers the carbon footprint, and reduces dependence on imports. It also enables biodiversity with the large amount of species available to produce protein (grasses, cereals, oil crops, pulses etc).

The total amount needed - primarily for animal feed but with growing importance also for human consumption - sums up to 84 million tons of crude protein. Only 36% of this demand is covered from domestic production<sup>1</sup>. Without doubt, Europe must and can do more in terms of increasing domestic protein production from plants. It is, therefore, the declared policy goal of the European Commission and Member States to increase the domestic production of protein<sup>2</sup> to reduce the European Union's dependency on their imports.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/food-farming-fisheries/farming/documents/eu-uk-feed-protein-balance-sheet\\_2019-2020\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/food-farming-fisheries/farming/documents/eu-uk-feed-protein-balance-sheet_2019-2020_en.pdf)  
[https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/food-farming-fisheries/plants\\_and\\_plant\\_products/documents/factsheet-eu-legumes\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/food-farming-fisheries/plants_and_plant_products/documents/factsheet-eu-legumes_en.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52018DC0757&from=EN>

**Euroseeds<sup>3</sup> is the voice of the European seed sector and is fully supportive of that goal. This paper presents some insights on how breeders can support improving the quantity and the quality of the EU protein production.**

## **The European Plant Breeders' role in a European Protein Plan**

The European Seed sector stands ready to support the ramping up of both the demand and the production of EU grown plant sourced protein. This paper lines out possible pathways for more domestic production of plant sourced protein, what the European Seed sector can contribute, and what it needs from policy makers to deliver this contribution.

There is no simple and easy solution to overcome the EU protein deficit. It will come from both a significant **extension of the cultivation area of so far still niche protein crops, and from an increase of the production per hectare of the already established crops**. This will involve rethinking the cropping system, of course without compromising the overall European agricultural production needs.

Creating new qualities, especially suited for human consumption, will also play an ever more important role in the future, as vegetable protein is more demanded by flexitarian, vegetarian and vegan consumers<sup>4</sup>.

Breeders are already strongly engaged in contributing to consumers' demand for more local, traceable, sustainable and secure protein production, also addressing farmers' needs for higher and more stable yields, increased pest resistance, and new qualities.

Past experience proves that not only the **offering of new products** (the "market push") drives the development of a new market, but to the same - and sometimes even greater extent - the **demand** (the "market pull"). For the creation of both market push and market pull, the establishing of effective incentives and reliable long-term framework conditions by policy makers is an indispensable necessity.

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<sup>3</sup> Euroseeds represent the interests of those active in research, breeding, production and marketing of seeds of agricultural, horticultural and ornamental plant species. Today, Euroseeds, with more than 34 national member associations from EU Members States and beyond, represents several thousand seed businesses, as well 67 direct company members, including from seed related industries.

<sup>4</sup> <https://organic-market.info/news-in-brief-and-reports-article/germany-9-3-million-vegetarians-and-vegans.html>

**There are some “success stories” from the past**, which vividly portray how this can work. Biodiesel demand e.g. was created and incentivized by European policies already back in the 1990s. Financial benefits, the possibility of using set-aside land for biofuel production and mandatory blending of fossil fuel with biofuel have proven to be very effective accelerators for both offer and demand. This enabled the development of a strong value chain, rewarding especially the oil content of the crop. The farmers embraced this market, which led to an increase of oilseed rape hectares in Europe by almost 100%. As the incentive was at European level, the spread of the production was visible in all Europe and all Member States could benefit from it. The breeders enabled this growth by supplying the seeds in terms of quantity and quality. By taking a holistic approach to breeding and thereby making the crop fit for multiple purposes (fuel, feed, food) breeders significantly enhanced the crop’s economic attractiveness for farmers, processors and addressed the consumers’ needs.

Past experience also showed negative effect when suitable market incentives are not established or even removed by policymakers. In 2000, the French authorities decided to attribute a quality-based subsidy for the French soybean production. The budget was 100 million francs (15.2 million euros). However, when this decision was revoked in 2002 at European level, the acreage which was at the top with 120 000 ha went down to 20 000 ha 6 years later.

**The protein value chain, including breeders, farmers, processors, traders and consumers, will certainly be able to repeat successes from other crops with protein crops too.** Breeders are willing to play an active role to enable it, provided the necessary policies are established to support these efforts.

## Requirements for increased EU domestic protein production

Increasing the domestic protein production to reduce dependency on imports, increase diversity in crop use and lower carbon footprint – needs the following framework conditions:

- **EU administration and legislator to provide clear commitment and steering to Members States and stakeholders**

- The EU Commission has initiated the **dialogue on the EU Protein Plan**. Very important findings have been elaborated during workshops and a high-level conference. Since then, the accountability has been largely transferred to Member States. Some of the Member states have started valuable first initiatives, while others have not acted yet.

- Euroseeds believes that for creating momentum and for achieving a consistent approach across Europe the **European Commission has to continue playing a key role** in defining cornerstones for the EU Protein Plan, including suitable instruments and aspirational targets for a defined date in the future (e.g. 2030). It requires an overall strategy and action plan along which the Member States should act.
  
- **EU and Member States to provide meaningful and long-term incentives to stakeholders**
  - Incentives for the production and consumption of domestic plant sourced protein - harmonized between EU and Members States - should comprise, amongst others:
    - Administrative rules / financial incentives for increased crop rotation using protein crops
    - Support of infrastructure development
    - Product labelling
  
- **Innovation-friendly framework conditions for competitive research and development**
  - EU support for enabling the use of the most **advanced breeding methods** so EU plant breeding, agriculture, and value chain remain competitive at a global level. This means the ability for EU breeders to use those tools to reach higher protein contents, higher yields, and more specific qualities through environmentally friendly practices.
  - EU Commission to consider funding **support to breeders in Horizon Europe**, complementary to the value chain development – to develop new crops but also to support projects targeting the increase and the quality of protein in already existing crops (e.g. soybean, OSR, wheat and many others). Both are needed: niches bring diversity, but the agricultural value chain needs some big size market to be scalable, sustainable, and competitive.
  - European support for maintaining an **EU harmonized registration system** promoting protein content and quality for relevant crops.
  - **Enforcement of the Farm Saved Seed (FSS)**, provision which is enshrined in the basic regulation of the Community Plant Variety Rights and the implementing Rules on the Agricultural Exemption. **A robust Plant Variety Protection mechanism drives**

**innovation and consequently leads to new genetics being made available to the European farmers. With a clear and workable FSS mechanism, farmers get more value for using varieties which are of better yield, performance and quality, while breeders get equitable remuneration for their innovation.**

- **EU bodies to support educational communication to consumers on the benefits of plant protein-based food and the use of domestically produced food and feed.**

This is a critical enabler of Farm to Fork and Green Deal achievement.

- **Favourable framework conditions enabling growers' competitiveness and profitability**

Growers need to secure competitive and profitable production. This would need access to best-in-class input, e.g. crop protection products, fertilizers and technologies.

## **The European Commission to take a leading role in supporting plant breeders**

Euroseeds, considering the Green Deal and the related Farm to Fork and Biodiversity strategies and related objectives, calls on the European Commission to take a leading role in promoting the domestic cultivation and use of plant sourced protein, in particular through:

- **setting aspirational targets** for EU domestic plant protein production levels by 2030;
- **identifying tools and methods** by which these targets can be achieved at Member State level, including but not limited to, increased crop rotation, including more protein plants and their use on set-aside land in the framework of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP);
- **taking a leading role in coordinating** the efforts of Member States in achieving these targets;
- **creating a legal and regulatory framework** which enables plant breeders to use innovative methods and which allows farmers to ensure the success of their crop and harvest through the necessary level of crop protection;

- **offering financial support** for the development, cultivation, processing and marketing of protein crops;
- **a long-term and broad communication initiative**, especially towards the end consumer, including the entire commodity chain, concerning the advantages of domestic protein production and use.



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