

Euroseeds asks for consistency in the Post-2020 Biodiversity Framework discussion to prevent negative impacts on conventional plant breeding

Euroseeds follows with concerns the developments which are debated under the banner of “synthetic biology” but that in fact result in plants that could also be obtained through earlier breeding methods or result from spontaneous processes in nature and that should be excluded from the scope of discussions on synthetic biology under the CBD. In addition, Euroseeds advocates for a consistent Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework target on “biotechnology” that aligns with the definitions and scope of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and its Cartagena Protocol with its original intention to focus on biosafety.

In the past decade, “new” technologies and/or potential applications emerging in the field of biotechnology have been debated under the banner of “synthetic biology” (SynBio), which is broadly defined to include enabling technologies such as genome editing. *“The EU seed and breeding sector is following these developments with concern and we are of the opinion that specifically genome editing applications that result in plants that could also be obtained through earlier breeding methods or result from spontaneous processes in nature should be excluded from the scope of discussions on synthetic biology under the CBD”,* says Garlich von Essen, Secretary General of Euroseeds. *“Otherwise, simple genome editing applications realized in products already on the market (e.g. like a soybean with improved fatty acid content including simple targeted mutations and marketed as non-GMO would be covered by the synthetic biology definition while currently many countries consider them as conventional varieties.”*

The European seed and breeding sector therefore supports the completion of the long outstanding analysis of whether synthetic biology is a “new and emerging issue relating to the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity” according to established criteria. Further extension of the work program on synthetic biology should not be endorsed without a determination that synthetic biology is in fact such an issue.

The European seed and breeding sector agrees with the inclusion of a biosafety target in the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework that is consistent in scope with the CBD obligations. The target must not expand the focus from biosafety risks associated with ‘Living modified Organisms (LMOs) – in Europe GMOs- resulting from biotechnology that could affect the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity’ to biotechnology as a whole.

“We specifically encourage the EU delegation to join other countries and to focus the scope of the target to its origin and to not extend the scope to applications from other biotechnologies, irrespective of whether or not they result in a Living Modified Organism as defined by the Cartagena Protocol” von Essen concludes.

Background: From 7 to 19 December 2022, the UN Biodiversity Conference (COP15) will take place in Montreal, Canada, and will be attended by representatives from governments all over the world to set goals to guide global action through 2030 to halt and reverse nature and biodiversity loss. In the context of a post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, world leaders will be discussing about targets for biodiversity conservation, the impact of new technologies as well as sustainable use and benefit-sharing for the coming decade.



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