

# Seeding tomorrow – European Commission presents key proposals for the future of plant breeding innovation

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**The EU Commission today presented its long-awaited proposals on New Genomic Techniques (NGTs) and Plant Reproductive Material (PRM). They will shape the future for Europe’s seed sector as well as for farmers and vegetable growers and have a strong impact on the entire EU agri-food chain.**

The first proposal on NGTs suggests differentiating plants resulting from targeted mutagenesis and cisgenesis methods from the transgenic GMO products as regulated more than two decades ago. It provides for two specific categories of plant products, each with adapted regulatory requirements and authorisation processes. Here, “conventional-like” category 1 plants, i.e. plants that could also result from older breeding methods or be found as natural mutations, would be brought under a new regime that establishes a verification procedure to confirm the category 1 status of the individual product.

Commenting on the proposal, Garlich von Essen, Secretary General of Euroseeds said: *“We welcome the differentiation of conventional-like NGTs from the outdated and practically unworkable approval requirements of transgenic GMOs. This is a prerequisite for a proportionate framework adapted to different profiles of these plants. But this verification process needs to be efficient and be based on clear scientific criteria to avoid that what should be a simple administrative process becomes politicised and inconclusive. Only then we will truly enable the development of improved NGT plant varieties across all breeding businesses, specifically including the typical European SMEs and public institutes, and create real opportunities to address the broad diversity of crops and traits.”*

*Euroseeds still sees some inconsistencies in the proposal that seem to separate the “conventional-like” NGT plants from plants resulting from conventional breeding. These inconsistencies include e.g. the prohibition to use NGT-derived plants in organic farming and a specific seed bag labelling requirement. “It is illogical. We first determine that the product is alike with what we can achieve with earlier and less precise methods, and then we forbid the use for a good part of our farmers.”* von Essen points out. *“This is unjustified discrimination. Every farmer must have the right to choose”.*

Accompanying its proposal, the Commission also announced its intention to assess, as part of a broader market analysis, the impact that the patenting of plants and related licensing and transparency practices may have on innovation in plant breeding. *“This discussion is of course*

*also very present in the seed sector and we will look forward to opportunities to contribute to such assessment."*

Concerning the Commission proposal on Plant Reproductive Material, Euroseeds welcomes that the pillars of the successful existing legislation are maintained. Effective guarantees for identity (DUS Distinctness, Uniformity, Stability), performance (VCU Value for Cultivation and Use) and quality (certification and defined high-quality standards), together with the certified health (phytosanitary control), of all seed products for all seed users, are instrumental to maintain both, the leading position of Europe's seed sector worldwide and the guaranteed supply of top-quality seed for an ever-increasing range of users and markets.

*"Europe today is the leading developer and exporter of seed worldwide. This is the result of a highly successful and competitive EU variety registration and seed marketing system. It is good to see that the foundation of this success is enshrined in the Commission's proposal", von Essen underlines. "However, we are concerned that some of the exemptions and lower quality requirements for some products may actually run contrary to maintaining fair rules and quality assurance for all suppliers and users of plant reproductive material."*

Regarding the inclusion of a new sustainability requirement in the proposal, Euroseeds considers it essential that this is implemented in a practical manner that does not lead to an unwanted narrowing of availability of improved varieties across the highly diverse range of seed products.

Concluding, Garlich von Essen commented: *"This is an important moment for Europe. We now have two proposals that provide the EU with a choice of what innovative technologies and what products we want to harness to make us more resilient and sustainable in ensuring our food security. Assuring farmers' access to high-quality seed of improved plant varieties that are the result of top-class science and innovation will be key to achieve this common goal".*



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