

Press Release

How will the NGT proposal shape future agri-food systems?

Brussels, 30th of November 2023 – During a Lunch Seminar on 29th November, co-hosted by European Parliament member Michaela Šojdrová, from the European People’s Party, and Plants for the Future ETP, farmers, policymakers, breeders and researchers came together to discuss the NGT legislative proposal and how it will shape what our future agri-food systems will look like. The legislative process is advancing with extraordinary speed and to facilitate the conversation, Plants For the Future provided an opportunity to delve into the details of what the proposal will mean for the actors on the ground.

The lunch was kicked off with opening remarks and setting the scene by MEP Šojdrová, as one of the shadow-rapporteurs of the NGT file from the Committee of Agriculture and Rural Development. With keen insights into the legislative, she emphasised its pivotal role in the ever-evolving agriculture landscape. She noted some points in the proposal that she proposes to amend. Among others, MEP Šojdrová marked compulsory labelling of NGT 1 plants as unjustified, “because conventional-like plants should be treated as conventional and the extra labelling requirement poses an unfounded distinction as well as unnecessary administrative burden”.

Next on the agenda was Professor Dirk Inze, an emeritus Professor at Ghent University and the Director of the Center for Plant Systems Biology at VIB. Prof Inze shared insights into the advancements in the precision breeding of crops using gene editing. Warmly welcomed by the audience were also his explanations on the current state of breeding and how it also includes much more unprecise and invasive techniques such as mutagenesis, which randomly induces genetic changes through exposure to radiation or chemicals. His presentation highlighted the efficiency and precision of the innovative approach of new genomic techniques, showcasing its role in increasing agrobiodiversity.

"We're witnessing a transformative era in agriculture. Precision breeding through gene editing is not just efficient; it's a game-changer for agrobiodiversity," commented Prof Inze. "The ability to make targeted changes swiftly and cost-effectively opens new doors for sustainable and resilient agriculture."

Dorrit Andersen, speaking on behalf of Danish organic vegetable farmers, brought a unique perspective to the discussion. Ms Andersen provided insights into the challenges faced by organic farmers and the role that Category 1 NGTs could play in overcoming these challenges while adhering to organic farming practices. Ms Andersen previously conducted a short survey among selected Scandinavian, Dutch and German farmers, which revealed support for integrating Category 1 NGTs into the organic farmers’ toolbox.

"Being an organic farmer is a commitment to sustainability, we are finding optimal ways to affect the environment as little as possible. New varieties, including from NGTs, offer us the opportunity to enhance our crop quality and stay competitive," Ms Andersen shared passionately.

Spanish farmer Felipe Cortines, managing both organic and conventional farming, provided a dual perspective on the intricate balance between tradition and innovation in agriculture. "Farming is about balancing environmental, social, and economic factors. NGTs are not just a technological advancement; they are a necessary tool for the future of agriculture," expressed Mr Cortines. "Especially among young farmers, there is a consensus that technology, including NGTs, is crucial for the future in farming."

The seminar went on with a dynamic open-floor discussion. Questions arose about possible alternatives, pitfalls, and expectations. Notably, MEPs encouraged farmers to share their perspectives through direct communication to their offices, underlining the importance of diverse voices in shaping future agricultural policies.

César González, Manager of Public Affairs at Euroseeds and Chair of the Plants for the Future Board of Directors, concluded the seminar noting the importance of such open-minded conversations, especially including organic farmers, so as not to exclude them from benefiting from technological advancements.

For more information please see Plants for the Future's events page [here](#).