

Smarter rules for safer and more sustainable food – Euroseeds at the EP public hearing on PRM

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Euroseeds Secretary General Garlich von Essen presented the views of the plant breeding and seed production sector at the European Parliament during a public hearing dedicated to collect EU stakeholders' perspectives on the Commission's proposal for a new Regulation on Plant Reproductive Material (PRM).

Euroseeds Secretary General Garlich von Essen took part in the public hearing, jointly organised by the European Parliament's Committees for Agriculture and for Environment, to share the seed sector's perspective on the legislative proposal the European Commission unveiled on July 5th on plant reproductive material.

"We are generally positive about the EU Commission's proposal; it is logical, stringent and clear, catering to the needs of the majority of the providers and users of classical PRM, while accommodating specific materials, markets or users that require derogations," stated von Essen. "It ensures uniform provisions and oversight where needed and allows for flexibility where possible."

One of the key novelties is the inclusion of plant reproductive material under the scope of the Regulation for official controls of the EU. This promotes enhanced alignment of implementation by Member States through involvement of the EU, ensuring a more standardized approach to quality guarantees across all types of plant reproductive material. "This legislation provides common rules for a common market; a harmonious implementation can be supported through appropriate EU involvement and advice."

The legislative proposal acknowledges the diverse nature of the sector, offering derogations and adaptations for specific materials (such as heterogeneous or conservation material), market segments, providers or users, such as conservation networks or amateur gardeners. "There is quite a lot of flexibility built into this Regulation. It is clearly not a one-size fits all approach but provides for specific rules according to type and intended use." Still, von Essen underlined that the industry strongly supports the principle that all PRM falls under the new legislation. "Regardless of whether farmers deal with commodity production or niche markets, and irrespective of whether they use heterogeneous material, old landraces or classical varieties, they all expect and deserve appropriate information, quality guarantees and protection from pests and diseases in their seed," von Essen emphasized. "Seed is a crucial input for sustainable farming; it demands precision and adherence to the highest standards."

User or consumer information and product quality also take centre stage in the newly introduced concept of a variety testing requirement for “Value for Sustainable Cultivation and Use (VSCU)”. While the plant breeding sector generally supports that varieties are tested for their performance prior to registration, the sector questions how this can be implemented as foreseen, especially for species without existing testing systems and defined protocols such as e.g. in the vegetable sector. “We must ensure that such a new system does not put undue burden and cost specifically on the many SMEs that are characteristic for the vegetable seed business.” von Essen underlined and stressed the importance for linking the implementation of this provision to the availability of well-established protocols rather than a strict deadline. He also expressed the expectation that this would be assured through collaboration of authorities at both EU and national levels with the sector.

In this context, von Essen also pointed to the importance of providing the sector with more opportunities to support the cost-effective and efficient implementation of the testing, registration and quality assurance provisions through accreditation of companies under official supervision of public authorities. “This is a highly professional sector with an impeccable track record as regards its quality assurance and standards. Working together with authorities, under their appropriate official control, holds a lot of potential to make the entire system faster and less costly.”

Next to these principal points, von Essen also stressed a number of aspects in the Commission’s proposal that still require further clarification or specifications, such as the movement of material from third countries for provision of defined services other than marketing (cleaning, quality control etc.) or the lack of compatibility of the provisions for heterogeneous material with the regular registration of varieties of grasses and fodder plants.

“This is a highly technical legislation that needs to take due account of the biological differences between species, of different marketing paths and uses etc. We understand the Commission’s motivation and approach to streamline and harmonise provisions as much as possible; but there is a justification for a certain level of differentiation and specificity as a means to achieve the overarching goal: assure the best possible seed for all European farmers and growers”, von essen summed up the view of the European seed sector on the Commission’s proposal.



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