

SUR FAQs

Focus on plant breeding and seed treatments

Why are sensitive areas vital for seed production and plant breeding?

Clean and healthy seeds are prerequisites for a healthy crop and consequently they are the starting point for sustainable agriculture. Seed production and plant breeding in the EU often take place in sensitive areas due to a unique combination of factors that are essential for breeding and seed production, such as soil fertility, climate conditions, access to water, etc. which cannot easily be found elsewhere.

Why are sensitive areas selected for breeders' activity?

Operating within sensitive areas is necessary to maintain the capacity for breeding and seed production as many of these areas naturally meet the required conditions, like pest free areas. Regulations often require seed production areas to be free from pests, diseases, weed seeds, etc. resulting in specific locations, such as windy coastal areas for seed potato production. Distance criteria need to be considered in plant breeding and seed production, to avoid mixing / impurity of seed lots by unwanted cross-pollination of plant varieties. Consequently, due to distance requirements it is not possible to find new areas with sufficient distance to existing seed production lots.

How to prevent SUR unintended impact on plant breeding and seed production.

Providing healthy seeds and resistant varieties can significantly reduce the use of plant protection products during agricultural production, as required by the SUR objectives. The impact of the proposal on sensitive areas may include the closure of breeding stations, termination of breeding activities, or relocation of seed production outside the EU, negatively impacting the European seed business, small holder farmers, and leading to increased pesticide use in the agricultural production. This is why, an exemption for plant breeding and seed production is necessary to minimize the economic and agricultural consequences, as only a small area requires exemption for a significant effect, and to achieve the reduction targets as set in the SUR.

How are seed treatments compatible with IPM?

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) considers all available means that discourage the development of populations of harmful organisms, while keeping the use of chemical plant protection products to levels that are economically and ecologically justified and minimise risks to human health and the environment.

Very often plants in their infancy stage are affected by soil-dwelling pests and diseases, which cannot be observed or captured by early diagnosis. Visible symptoms indicate a stage at which no other measure can satisfy crop needs.

In such cases, experienced growers do not to apply the “cascade principle” (hierarchy of tools) but the “ALARA principle” (As Low As Reasonably Achievable) considering all (economically, environmentally, agronomically, technically) viable alternatives, decision to be taken at parcel level.

Why can seed treatments be considered a precision farming tool?

Seed treatment is a precision application technique of plant protection products. Being a targeted, onetime application on seed, seed treatment effectively reduces the proportion of the treated area that comes into direct contact with the active substance. Additionally, seed treatment limits the potential exposure for operators, bystanders, and non-target species.



Avenue des Arts 52 B
1000 Brussels

www.euroseeds.eu

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