



JOINT PRESS RELEASE

19 November 2019, Brussels

Growing the Future Together: breeders and farmers underline the importance of plant breeding innovation for sustainable agriculture

Plant breeding innovation is essential to contribute to a sustainable agriculture production that fosters food security and healthy nutrition. This is one of the key messages by the High-level Conference on Plant Breeding Innovation “Growing the Future Together” held by Copa-Cogeca and Euroseeds in Brussels this morning.

The event, organised under the auspices of the Finnish Presidency of the Council, outlined the challenges and opportunities for plant breeding innovation in the EU and provided an occasion for an open and constructive dialogue on the potential such innovations hold for sustainable farming, healthier and more nutritious food production, and environmental performance.

Improved plant varieties are the starting point of all food production. To stay competitive, Europe’s plant breeders need to be able to access the latest plant breeding tools that help develop new plants for farmers that better withstand pests and diseases, but also help mitigate climate change and meet consumer demands in terms of quality and healthy diets.

In his opening address, Council President Jari Leppä underlined that “new plant breeding techniques can give us plants that more quickly adapt to a changing climate” and expressed his hope that the Commission’s Green Deal programme “will also take into account the first link in the food chain as the plant breeding is”.

Thorben Sprink from the Julius-Kühn-Institute in Germany presented the huge diversity of innovative developments in diverse crops and vegetables, addressing many different plant characteristics like stress tolerance, pest resistance, quality or yield. Peter Annas from the cooperative Lantmännen in Sweden pointed out the practical challenges the current regulatory approach in Europe poses for an international cooperative active all along the agri-food value chain in seed, feed and food products.

Pekka Pesonen, Secretary General of Copa and Cogeca underlined that “New Breeding Techniques (NBTs) have a fundamental role to play for the green growth of European agriculture and can provide solutions to the numerous challenges it is facing, such as climate change effects and fierce international competition. NBTs are not a luxury but an urgent necessity for the vitality of the whole EU farming model, striving for increased sustainability.”

“Europe should embrace plant breeding innovation and make sure it does not fall behind the rest of the world in terms of development of new plants and the societal and environmental benefits they can bring. The broad interest and participation to this event demonstrated the urgency of the call to the European Institutions to take appropriate action as quickly as possible.” stated Garlich von Essen, Secretary General of Euroseeds.

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