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Press Release

Plant reproductive material (PRM) reform: Farmers, small breeders and seed diversity organisations call on MEPs to defend agrobiodiversity

Yesterday, 4 March, farmers, small breeders, seed savers and conservation organisations came together in Brussels to send a clear message to policymakers: Europe's new seed marketing laws have to safeguard cultivated plant diversity, implement farmers' rights, and support small-scale and organic breeders.

Hosted in the European Parliament by Herbert Dorfmann (EPP, Rapporteur), Martin Häusling (Greens/EFA, Shadow Rapporteur) and Christophe Clergeau (S&D, Rapporteur for the Environment Committee), the event "PRM Reform – Safeguarding Europe's Cultivated Plant Diversity" brought together representatives of the Parliament, Council and Commission and practitioners to exchange views on the proposed new EU Regulation of Production and Marketing of Plant Reproductive Material (PRM). The event took place one month after the start of trilogue negotiations. At the event, the Cyprus Council Presidency confirmed it goals to reach agreement by the end of June.

Rapporteur and Shadow Rapporteurs highlighted the need to give space for diversity in the final text, in particular regarding farmers' right and conservation varieties. The Cyprus presidency showed confidence in finding compromises.

"Some Member States' concerns that more flexible rules would create parallel markets and weaken seed quality standards should not be overstated, nor used to justify an unduly and disproportionate limitation of farmers' and gardeners' choice, and of the work of organic breeders and seed companies. We believe that it is possible for all institutions to find common ground to accommodate the needs of different farming systems and to leave space for biodiversity, in the common interest" said Eric Gall, Deputy Director of IFOAM Organics Europe.

The existing PRM marketing directives have historically favoured uniform, standardised varieties, making it difficult for heterogeneous and locally adapted varieties to access the market and restricting farmers' rights. The new PRM regulation must correct this, by:

- Recognizing farmers' rights on seeds and other PRM, and in particular PRM exchanges between farmers.
- Guaranteeing real market access for non-uniform and organic varieties.
- Providing strong support for the dynamic conservation of cultivated plant diversity.
- Designing proportionate rules that do not exclude small operators from the market through excessive administrative burden.

At the event diverse stakeholders presented the value of cultivated plant diversity and farmers' rights, both for preserving Europe's cultural food heritage and for strengthening the resilience of European agriculture. The practitioners' inputs made clear that in light of the various challenges facing agriculture today, a modern marketing regulation should not restrict the types of varieties that can be circulated owing to an outdated attachment to the notion of genetic uniformity, but rather support decentralised PRM production based on the greatest possible diversity of varieties, species, and market actors. Attendees were able to experience the culinary aspect of diversity in a tasting led by a chef from the Slow Food network, showing that this reform will have an impact beyond seeds and marketing rules: "It is about the food we eat every day. When seed laws favour uniformity, our plates and our shelves become poorer, more standardised, and less connected with the realities of Europe's territories, whether it's about taste, nutritional quality, food cultures, farmers' livelihoods, or the resilience of local food systems" says Giulia Gouet, Advocacy Officer at Slow Food.

"Agrobiodiversity is our insurance against the challenges for tomorrow. Diverse varieties help farmers cope with changing growing conditions. The new EU PRM regulation needs to support resilience by letting farmers and gardeners choose the varieties that suit their needs best" says Magdalena Prieler, Seed Policy Expert at ARCHE NOAH.

"This reform is an opportunity for the EU to finally formally recognise farmers' rights to exchange PRM with other farmers, which is essential for agrobiodiversity", declared Alessandra Turco, member of European Coordination Via Campesina's Coordinating Committee. "This regulation should therefore not be applied to such exchanges, which are not marketing, but rather constitute mutual aid between farmers for the purpose of dynamic management of PRM."

The participating organisations call on the trilogue negotiations to make the necessary modifications to the legislation proposal to support these objectives. Otherwise, the regulation will be a missed opportunity to support agrobiodiversity and the broad diversity of actors, organizations, networks and SMEs committed to this purpose.

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