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EU Seed Law Nears Conclusion: Final Trilogue Negotiations Tomorrow

Europe Must Strengthen Agricultural Diversity

Schiltern, Vienna, Brussels – The final political trilogue negotiation on the new EU seed law is on the agenda in Brussels tomorrow. Decisions taken now risk causing irreversible damage to Europe's agriculture and seed diversity. Originally, the reform was intended to bring more transparency and simplified procedures – in reality, new restrictions and additional bureaucracy are now on the table. *"What's at stake is whether small and medium-sized farms and seed companies can continue to operate independently and whether agricultural diversity in Europe is preserved,"* warns Paul Grabenberger, seed policy expert at ARCHE NOAH in Brussels.

On 5 July 2023, the EU Commission presented the new "Regulation of the European Parliament and the Council on the production and marketing of plant reproductive material in the Union." Since the last failed reform attempt in 2014, that would have severely restricted agrobiodiversity, ARCHE NOAH has been advocating in Brussels for the explicit permission of disseminating and sustainably using crop diversity, and for the complete removal of all regulations that hinder this aim. "Europe must not repeat the mistakes of the failed reform attempt - ignoring the diverse realities of the European farmers and gardeners, who work tirelessly to save and share Europe's crop diversity", cautions Paul Grabenberger.

The current negotiations threaten significant setbacks for farmers' seed systems and the local seed industry. Both are crucial for protecting our agriculture and traditions. At a time when just three corporations – Bayer, Corteva, and Syngenta – already control more than half of the global seed market, the proposed rules risk accelerating this concentration, locking European farmers into dependence on a handful of global players. *"The European Parliament, and in particular its rapporteur Herbert Dorfmann, hold the power to determine whether agricultural innovation and regional seed traditions will remain possible in the future, or whether diversity in Europe will be quietly swept under the rug,"* says Paul Grabenberger.

The very foundation of Europe's crop diversity is now under direct threat. Under the current compromise texts, the sharing of seeds for conservation purposes would be severely restricted, pushing long-standing practices into a legal grey zone. Local seed initiatives, including seed libraries, risk becoming effectively illegal. Farmers could be prohibited from exchanging seeds beyond narrow geographic limits — even when dealing with traditional varieties. The exchange of even the smallest quantities could be punishable, while farmers and civil society are simultaneously burdened with additional layers of bureaucracy.

"Agriculture Ministers must come to a sensible compromise with the Parliament's positions," demands Paul Grabenberger of ARCHE NOAH. *"Europe needs seed legislation that protects agricultural diversity, ensures healthy and diverse food, and respects the rights of farmers!"*

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