


The need for a new seed legislation

IFOAM EU position

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IFOAM EU is the European umbrella organisation for organic food and farming. IFOAM EU has more than 160 member organisations and we represent the entire organic food chain and beyond: from farmers and processors, retailers, certifiers, consultants, traders and researchers to environmental and consumer advocacy bodies.

We fight for the adoption of ecologically, socially and economically sound systems based on the principles of organic agriculture – health, ecology, fairness and care.

The current policy context

- The seed market in the EU is regulated by the EU marketing requirements on Plant Reproductive Material
- This legislation was written for conventional, industrial agriculture with highly standardised varieties
- The European Parliament rejected a proposal from the European Commission for new legislation in 2014
- The Commission withdrew the proposal, and since then there has been no development



Need for a new legislation

- Farmers are not allowed to sell or exchange seeds they have bred themselves
- Plant varieties must be officially registered
- The administrative and financial burden for registration is very high
- Small-scale breeders struggle with this system
- The varieties also need to comply with the DUS criteria – Distinct, Uniform, Stable
- Organic breeders and small-scale breeders are usually excluded from the registration because they aim for broader genetic diversity, essential for higher adaptability to local farming conditions





Problems & solutions

Current marketing rules hinder seed diversity

- Sale of many varieties prevented
- Adaptability to local climatic & farming conditions decreased
- Diversity is restricted and uniform varieties are favoured
- Whereas less homogeneous, open-pollinated varieties and populations are discriminated against
- Organic farmers do not have access to suitable varieties
- Loss of agrobiodiversity and genetic resources – 90% of crop varieties have disappeared from farmers' fields



Solutions

- Protecting and developing agrobiodiversity to be set as priority
- Allow traditional and new varieties with broad genetic spectrum to the market
- The evaluation of uniformity to be adjusted to the type and use of a new plant variety
- Reduce the administrative and financial burden, esp. for local seeds and niche varieties
- Adapted rules must be developed and applied for open-pollinated varieties and populations for organic farming
- Implement transparency rules to ensure farmers and breeders have freedom of choice regarding patents and breeding techniques (new GMOs)



Oligopoly and discrimination against small operators

- Consolidation of the market – 5 companies control 75% of the seed varieties
- Farmers legally prohibited from selling and exchanging seeds
- Distinct, Uniform, Stable (DUS) and Value for Cultivation Use (VCU) tests severely restrict registration and market access
- Contribution of breeders, farmers and seed savers to genetic resource pool is ignored



Solutions

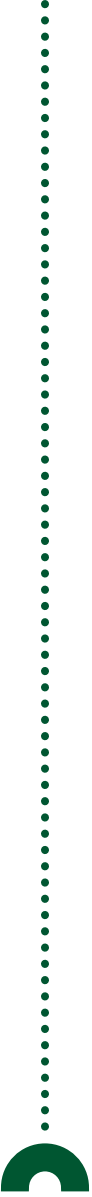
- Exclude varieties not protected by intellectual property rights from the obligation of registration
- Make VCU testing optional for breeders
- Adapt DUS testing for organic varieties and open-pollinated varieties
- Heterogeneous material should be exempted from the obligation of registration on the common seed catalogue and be allowed for use by organic farmers
- Include the species & variety names, place of origin (region or country), propagation region and production year in the mandatory information



Advantages of organic plant breeding

- Preservation and development of genetic diversity in crops
- Adaptability to local conditions and low-input farming
- Increases in yields for low-input farming
- Preservation of local varieties, their genetic strengths and cultural heritage
- Recognition of farmers as breeders and participatory plant breeding enabled





It is high time to introduce a new proposal that promotes agricultural biodiversity and meets the varied needs of diverse agricultural practices, the interests of farmers, consumers and our future food security.



Thank you for your attention!