

Conference

Genetic Resources for EU Agriculture: Status and Vision

Brussels, 9th June 2016

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends!

I have the pleasure to welcome you to this conference and would like to thank you for your interest in discussing with us the findings of a major study – or "preparatory action" as it is officially called - on the status of genetic resources conservation in Europe. The conference is also about visions with regard to a better management and use of these valuable resources.

I would like to thank the partners in the consortium of the study; VVA consulting, Arcadia international, CBS , Wageningen University and the German Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture for their work. Also all the stakeholders and Commission services that have contributed to this study should be mentioned.

I would like to invite you to reflect with the authors of the study and with us on the recommendations of the preparatory action. By the end of the day we will hopefully have a better understanding of the key issues, challenges and potential actions to better fully valorise and tap into the potential our genetic resources.

Following an initiative taken by the European Parliament, a Community budget was set aside for a preparatory action for the conservation and sustainable use of genetic resources for food and agriculture. The evaluation of the second Community programme on genetic resources highlighted the need for further actions in relation to the sustainable use of genetic resources.

The European Commission - DG AGRI contracted 2014 this “*Preparatory action on EU plant and animal genetic resources*”.

The objectives of the preparatory action are:

- To **provide a comprehensive description and analysis of the state of the art of genetic resources-related activities in the EU** for **plant, animal, forest and microbial** genetic resources.
- To provide **practical recommendations** to ensure the effective **conservation and sustainable use** of genetic resources in agriculture as a matter of general interest. It means more than only research and breeding activities. The **complete agro-food supply chain** is under consideration. Recommendations should take into consideration differences between MS regarding the state of agro-biodiversity and related conservation policies.

The preparatory action shall provide support for Europe-wide interlinking actors, projects and activities in conservation and sustainable use of genetic resources.

Dear colleagues,

Most of you have been participating in this study which was launched in 2014 and now reaches its conclusion as we are here today.

You are representing botanical gardens, breeders, authorities, experts and end users. Many of you have been partners in the 21 case studies which give us

insight in to the possibilities conserve the genetic resources and see also as they find their way from the field to fork. They serve as examples how important it is that the stakeholders are on board in this activity.

Many of you have taken part in the series of the seven dedicated workshops during the whole lifespan of this preparatory action.

The recommendations of this study are grouped under seven main themes:

The first issues of this study are **communication** between the actors and member states, **networking** among key stakeholders as well as **exchange** of knowledge and research results. The other themes are **breeding methods and legislation, administrative burden, rural development measures** and finally the **bottlenecks and enabling conditions** for the sustainable use of genetic resources.

As it seem, that the actors are not meeting each other too much, I hope that this congress serves well the purpose of active networking and communication between actors in European level.

Genetic resources are the biological basis of global food and nutrition security. Cultivated and domesticated genetic resources are part of our cultural heritage.

Preserved genetic resources support breeding and diversification in agriculture, forestry and the food chain. They will help also to meet future demand of consumers. The “minor species” are often the base to the production of quality food and other products for niche markets.

In addition, some genetic resources are an important source of renewable raw materials and energy. The diversity of microorganisms plays a major role in

maintaining the biosphere and provides a vast and largely untapped resource for humankind.

The EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2020 includes an action on conserving Europe's agricultural genetic diversity by encouraging the uptake of agri-environmental measures and exploring the scope for developing a strategy for the conservation of genetic diversity.

According to that, particular attention should be given to the potential of further developing genetic diversity, to adjust to changing local conditions.

The challenge is to integrate the use of genetic diversity along the whole production chain and make conservation and use, including locally adapted breeding, a cost-effective business.

The need to increase the economic viability of managing, using and breeding local, under used or rare breeds and crops is one of the topic of this study but the landraces and rare breeds will be special focus of the 2nd preparatory action.

Dear audience

Before I hand over to director Daniel Traon to present in more detail the content and later the outcomes of the preparatory action, I would like to draw your attention to on-going activities and existing tools in support of the preservation and use of genetic resources.

1. Under the Common Agricultural Policy, the rural development programmes offer opportunities to implement measures for the conservation and sustainable

use of genetic resources. This is particularly the case under the agro-environment-climate measures.

2. Rural Development Programs are also offering **new instrument for EIP-AGRI: Operational Groups** for innovative actions. First example of OG working for genetic resources come from Schleswig-Holstein. This innovation project of animal farmers, breeders, researchers is working for solutions to breeding questions for small populations.

(I hope they have also being able to attend this conference).

3. Two years ago the **EIP-AGRI Focus Group on Genetic Resources** brought together 20 experts to adress the bottlenecs that limit cooperation between European farmers, breeders, researchers and advisers in the field of conservation and use of genetic resources in agriculture. They gathered successful examples of cooperation agreements and joint actions. They proposed new projects and ways to engage and motivate public and private stakeholders in this work.

4. As regards **research activities**, the agricultural part of Societal Challenge 2 of Horizon 2020 provides openings to support evaluation, characterisation, conservation and use of agricultural biodiversity. Previous calls for proposals have addressed the management and use of landraces as well as ex-situ conservation. Funded projects are:

DIVERSIFOOD (various crops), TRADITOM (tomato) and TREASURE (pig):

Horizon 2020 thematic networks work on a specific theme. They bring people from both science and practice together to create useful, practical outputs. Thematic networks are funded through Horizon 2020. The call for thematic network is an open call. **It would offer an excellent possibility to connect people and organisations working for genetic resources.**

Finally, I would like to draw your attention to the **2017 Work Programme of Societal Challenge 2**. You will find there a call for proposals to create a network and improve capacities for in-situ conservation in Europe.

After this conference the report and the recommendations will be finalised and the report will be published next autumn.

But even the **preparatory actions** are not over yet:

A **second** preparatory action is already launched and it has the lifespan of one year. While the first action is providing the mapping, description of the situation and recommendations concerning conservation and sustainable use, the aim of that second study is to foster the use of neglected agricultural genetic resources. It intends to provide different categories of stakeholders with **concrete examples** to valorise the use of neglected breeds and varieties in an **economically viable way**.

My colleagues and friends,

I wish you an interesting day, excellent presentations and discussions and fruitful networking!