

THE CONTEXT

Farmers are not allowed to sell or exchange seed they have bred themselves, unless specific conditions are met. The plant variety and the person or organisation selling the seed must both be registered. The administrative and financial burden of registration is very high and prevents many small-scale breeders from entering the market. The testing required by the regulation is suited to highly uniform plants that remain so over multiple generations. On the other hand, organic breeders and small, local seed suppliers aim for broader genetic diversity because it is essential for the adaptability of plants to local farming conditions and changes in weather patterns, and because it is the basis for natural disease and pest resistance.

The seed market in the EU is currently regulated by the EU marketing requirements on Plant Reproductive Material. This legislation was written for conventional, industrial agriculture with highly standardised plant varieties. This is directly linked to a loss of seed and crop biodiversity, which in turn can lead to a decrease in plants' abilities to adapt to changes in climate and can threaten food security.

The European Parliament rejected a proposal from the European Commission for new legislation in 2014 because it failed to create a level playing field for organic and local varieties. The Commission subsequently withdrew its proposal. Since then, there's been no development.

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



ADVANTAGES OF ORGANIC PLANT BREEDING

Organic plant breeding and variety development is sustainable, enhances genetic diversity and relies on natural reproductive ability. It aims for new varieties particularly suited for organic production systems.

- Preservation and development of genetic diversity in crops
- Adapted and/or adaptable to local conditions and low-input farming
- Increases in yields for low-input farming
- Adaptation to climate change and resilience to extreme weather events
- Preservation of local varieties, their genetic strengths and cultural heritage
- Further development of innovation in organic farming
- Recognition of farmers as breeders and participatory plant breeding enabled

**CHANGE THE SEED LEGISLATION
TO ENABLE THE DEVELOPMENT OF
ORGANIC PLANT BREEDING**

To find out what you can do or for more information:

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NEW SEED LEGISLATION IS NEEDED



5 COMPANIES

CONTROL **75%** OF THE SEEDS
sold throughout the world

putting **FARMERS**
& **THE FOOD WE EAT** 
IN THE HANDS OF JUST A FEW PLAYERS

ORGANIC  **ARE PARTICULARLY
FARMERS AND CONSUMERS** **DISADVANTAGED** by
the current requirements

The current seed laws contribute to the
CONSOLIDATION OF THE MARKET



**90% of crop varieties
HAVE DISAPPEARED
FROM FARMERS' FIELDS**

**GENETIC DIVERSITY
OF CROPS IS ESSENTIAL** 
for future **food security**

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PROBLEMS CAUSED BY THE CURRENT LEGISLATION AND WHAT CAN BE DONE



CURRENT MARKETING RULES HINDER SEED DIVERSITY

- Sale of many varieties prevented
- Adaptability to changes in climate conditions decreased
- Diversity is restricted, often forcing organic farmers to use unsuitable seeds
- Organic farmers do not have access to the varieties they need
- Loss of agrobiodiversity and genetic resources

WHAT CAN BE DONE

- Protecting and developing biodiversity should be an overarching goal of the seed legislation
- Allow traditional and new varieties with a broad genetic spectrum access to the market
- Reduce the administrative and financial burden, especially for local and specialty seeds
- Implement transparency rules to ensure farmers and breeders have freedom of choice regarding patents and breeding techniques
- Allow for breeding and variety testing adapted to organic and local conditions



OLIGOPOLY & DISCRIMINATION AGAINST SMALL OPERATORS

- 5 companies control 75% of the seed varieties
- Contribution of breeders, farmers and seed savers to genetic resource pool ignored
- Farmers are legally prohibited from selling and exchanging seeds
- Distinct, uniform, stable (DUS) and value for cultivation use (VCU) tests severely restrict registration and therefore market access
- Insufficient information available to farmers and breeders

WHAT CAN BE DONE

- Exclude varieties not protected by intellectual property rights from the regulation
- Make VCU testing optional for the breeder
- Include the species and variety names, place of origin (region or country), propagation region and production year in the mandatory information
- Reduce the required number of test locations for niche varieties
- Adapt DUS testing for organic varieties



UNIFORMITY

Uniform varieties are favoured whereas less homogeneous, open-pollinated varieties and populations are discriminated against. This promotes industrial varieties, adversely affects agro-biodiversity and can lead to a loss of genetic resources.

High uniformity is required, despite the fact that uniformity in itself is of no value, especially as uniformity is often required in traits that are of no interest for the grower. This is even counterproductive and hinders the development of varieties suited for organic farming, which have good yield capacities and can adapt to changing environmental conditions.

WHAT CAN BE DONE

- The evaluation of uniformity needs to be adjusted to the type and use of a new plant variety. The criteria used to identify the new variety should be reduced to agronomically relevant traits.
- Allow farmers, gardeners and conservation networks to exchange and sell seed
- Adapted rules must be developed and applied for breeders who want to market open-pollinated varieties and populations for organic farming and who do not want to claim plant variety protection