



Seed imports from Ukraine, a cheap shot for European farmers

The Covid-19 crisis has demonstrated the need for the EU to maintain control over its strategic production sectors. This includes seeds. However, on 7 April, the Commission – on the initiative of DG SANTE – published an “equivalence” proposal allowing seeds produced in Ukraine to be sold on the European market at a dumped price, despite such seeds not being subject to the same phytosanitary rules as EU producers.

An apparently technical measure with severe negative consequences for the EU internal market

The proposal submitted by the EU Commission on April 7th might be based on a technical analysis of Ukrainian legislation and the system for the inspection and certification of cereal seed, the decision is yet undeniably political in nature. Under cover of a purely technical dossier, the Commission cannot ignore the fact that such a decision would have strong economic, social and environmental consequences for the European seed production chain.

The European Commission's text considers that this equivalence would contribute to maintaining a continuous supply of high quality seeds in the Union and reduce the risks of production in a single climatic zone. This argument is not relevant because European production is already spread over a large proportion of the territory, which already makes it possible to secure production, thanks to its climatic diversity.

Another shot at the European agriculture competitiveness

For example, maize seed production is already predominantly distributed between France, Hungary and Romania, which account for almost 80% of EU production. This geographical distribution already makes it possible to cope with climatic hazards. Furthermore, again using the example of maize seed production, the European Union is a net exporter and does not face problems of quality seed supply. Maintaining supply is therefore not an issue for this sector.

On the contrary, granting this equivalence will distort competition for European farmers for various reasons. First of all, due to lower labour costs in Ukraine compared to the rest of the European Union, large farm structures and access to crop protection products banned in Europe.

On this last major point, we can mention atrazine, acetochlor and a wide range of neonicotinoids (Clothianidin, Thiamethoxam and Thiacloprid) which remain authorised in Ukraine even though they are banned in the EU, sometimes for many years (since 2004 for Atrazine!). The production cost of maize seed is thus much lower in Ukraine.

This situation will lead to a loss of competitiveness of the European industry, the first victims of which will be European farmers, through a relocation of production or increased pressure on their income.

Supporting European farmers and valorizing their achievements towards sustainability

Finally, at a time when the European Commission has just presented its Farm to Fork and Biodiversity strategies, which advocate, among other things, for a reduction of the most dangerous plant protection products, fairer remuneration in the food chain and a strengthening of the EU's competitiveness and resilience, this decision appears to be totally out of step and in total contraction with these objectives.

As such the Agriculture & Progress Platform is strongly mobilizing on this issue and calls for an impact assessment study taking all the above mentioned elements into account before any decision is taken.

Such a constructive way forward would allow to ensure that the principles laid out in the Farm-to-Fork and Biodiversity Strategy are respected and prevent imports of illegal agriculture in the European Union – effectively undermining the hard work that European farmers are undertaking.

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