



Press release

Conference on New Breeding Techniques with MEP Paolo de Castro

Agriculture can innovate, give us the means to do so!

On 13th April 2021, under the patronage of MEP Paolo de Castro, the Agriculture & Progress platform hosted a conference on Innovative Breeding Techniques. The debate highlighted the needs of the agricultural sector to have effective tools at its disposal in order to face a rising number of pests and diseases, and at the same time to reduce the use of Plant Protection Products. The debate showcased the efforts made by the agricultural community to comply with Green Deal objectives whilst remaining a player in an overcompetitive global agricultural sector. Speakers highlighted the need to establish a clear legal distinction between GMOs and New Breeding Techniques (NBTs), and put emphasis on the need to have access to innovation through biotechnologies.

In his opening statement, **MEP Paolo de Castro (S&D)** pointed out the timeliness of this issue of NBTs, given that the European Commission has been tasked by the Council of the EU to conduct a study on NBTs in light of the ECJ ruling on mutagenesis and submit a proposal by end of this month. Noting that the ECJ's decision crucially did not distinguish between transgenesis and mutagenesis, he explained that mutagenesis is a natural process operating on the code of the plants. Mr. De Castro called for "a movement towards a new more sustainable transition", which would offer viable alternatives to farmers in fighting plant diseases while achieving the goals of the Green Deal at the same time.

Vicky Marissen (College of Europe) gave insights into the regulatory framework and its deficiencies. She explained that the debate in the past couple of years had focused too much on GMO legislation, which encircles the regulatory processes for NBTs and is preventing legal distinction. Going forward, "reflection is needed to develop an appropriate and adapted regulatory framework if we are to foster EU scientific development and to guarantee an appropriate agricultural toolbox to deal with the challenges the agricultural community faces, not in the least due to climate change".

Rob Van Tetering (SESvanderhave) provided a testimonial from the field by outlining research challenges in agriculture and sugar beet breeding. In an environment in which plant breeding becomes increasingly complex, employing NBT makes the difference. Considering various environmental challenges, where new diseases can have a huge impact on crops, the access to NBTs which can help prevent crop losses is crucial. If left out, the EU sugar sector could lose its competitiveness to countries which have access to and fund innovative breeding techniques. He implored European decision-makers to judge NBTs on a product-based regulatory approach, not focusing on the method, and not mistaking them for GMOs.

Céline Duroc (AGPM) testified on behalf of the French maize sector. She explained that producing maize in Europe is not the same as producing it elsewhere due to a lack of access to innovative solutions. The main problem with NBTs remains uncertainty regarding access. To keep up with Green Deal ambitions, NBTs are a key tool for the maize sector: "Biotechnologies are key and have strong hopes that the EU can face environmental challenges thanks to NBTs".

In his concluding remarks, MEP Paolo de Castro asserted that we should differentiate between mutagenesis and transgenesis (GMOS), and urged researchers to help EU decision-makers to make this distinction. It is paramount to provide a clear distinction, because NBTs accelerate natural processes, which could improve everyone's future.

The webinar was attended by more than 100 people, proving the issues importance. You can find the Agriculture & Progress Platform's position paper [here](#). For more information, please contact: platform@agriprogress.info