



***Developing and supporting New Breeding Techniques  
a key priority for the Agriculture and Progress Platform***

***Only a specifically developed legislative and regulatory framework  
can accommodate this***

*The agricultural community in the EU faces several challenges: produce sufficiently for a growing population, produce sustainably to address environmental and climate change issues, ensure competitiveness in a sector that is exposed to international markets whilst generating a decent income.*

*To face these inevitable challenges, the development of New Breeding Techniques (NBTs) is crucial not only for the agricultural community but also for the downstream industry chain and ultimately for the consumer.*

*The Agriculture and Progress Platform has duly taken note of the ECJ ruling on Case C-528/16 clarifying the legal status of mutagenesis. The ruling finds that mutagenesis leads a priori to products subject to EU GMO legislation. Member states can legislate the issue further which may lead to diverging rules throughout Europe. We therefore believe that the consequences of this ruling could be particularly detrimental for maize and beet growers and the downstream production chain.*

*In our view it is crucial to start discussion between decision-makers and stakeholders as soon as possible, in view of developing an adapted and workable regulatory framework that addresses the specificities of NBTs. This framework must and can in our view combine state-of-the-art scientific expertise and evidence whilst guaranteeing safe and high quality food with improved properties to consumers. The Agriculture and Progress Platform is keen to play an active role in these discussions in order to generate legal and economic certainty as soon as possible.*

**NBTs, a crucial tool for further reduction of the use of Plant Protection Products**

History shows that when faced with challenges, society has always turned to innovation. Notably the agricultural sector has proven that the use of innovative techniques is the path to progress. With plant protection products being criticised and a general call to reduce their use, New Breeding Techniques are an efficient and necessary tool to accompany a new agricultural evolution.

Reducing the use of plant protection products is an objective that the maize and beet growers have set themselves already years ago by committing to Integrated Pest Management which in turn has led to the use of techniques such as coated/pelleted seeds, optimising crop rotation, precision farming,... More recently, the development of robotics and digital farming have also started complementing the agricultural toolbox.

New Breeding Techniques, amongst others mutagenesis, are key complementary tools that will allow meeting society's demand to reconcile agricultural production with sustainability and respect for the environment. But the investments in terms of R&D and the time required to overcome technical barriers are so considerable that the uncertainty currently generated at EU level risks preventing NBTs from becoming mainstream and a permanent part of the agricultural toolbox.



### **An EU NBT framework needs to guarantee competitiveness in global agricultural markets**

Furthermore, the EU's agricultural markets cannot be seen in isolation from global markets. Some of the EU's key trading partners (US, India, Canada, Japan,...) have developed or are in the process of developing a regulatory framework for NBTs. These regulatory frameworks are most often based on case-by-case assessment and do not systematically refer NBTs to the GMO framework.

By doing so, these trading partners allow for innovation, for underpinning R&D and commercial development of their economy. If the EU chooses a different path or leaves too much uncertainty for too long, the impact on the Plant Breeding industry and the agricultural sectors will be substantial. The EU risks lagging behind the rest of the world in terms of using innovative tools that allow sustainable progress of its agri-food chain.

### **Ignorance breeds intolerance: explaining NBTs to a wider audience**

NBTs are mostly unknown to consumers, as is their potential to reduce e.g. food waste and in lowering the environmental impact and cost of producing food. And ignorance breeds intolerance. To raise awareness of the potential of NBTs, we look first and foremost to Plant Breeding companies and to the farming community.

We firmly believe that decision-makers and notably EU decision-makers have a responsibility in reaching out to the public to contain unsubstantiated scare-mongering and give a factual explanation of what NBTs are and are not and what added-value they can bring to consumers.

### **Developing an adapted, workable legal and regulatory framework for NBTs: the sooner the better**

- On the basis of the ECJ ruling, Member State authorities are left with concrete queries as to how they should integrate the findings of the ECJ in practical and operational terms. If not properly guided, this risks generating a patch-work of situations arising in the various EU Member States, which is detrimental to the farming community and the downstream production chain in any case.
- Does all of this mean that the Agriculture and Progress Platform pleads for lenience when it comes to NBTs? By no means. Of course, consumers need to be able to rely on the fact that the food on their plate is safe, that a scientific body needs to assess any potential health concerns and that a coherent and well-balanced regulatory process is in place.
- Given the specific nature of NBTs however, the current GMO legislative and regulatory framework is not fit for purpose. Thorough reflection and discussion is needed to work out a workable and adapted solution. A legal framework for NBTs should be based on scientific evaluation, allowing to guarantee the safety of food produced via NBTs, with a clear process of evaluation and authorisation and regulatory costs in proportion to the potential markets.
- We call on the EU Commission to explore, in close cooperation with Member states and stakeholders, the development of such a framework in the near future. The Agriculture and Progress Platform will – with input from the relevant technical/research institutes - be preparing an outline of the key principles of the regulatory framework for the end of May and would be keen on participating in further discussions on this crucial topic.