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Press Release

Environment/Agriculture/EU

## **Seed Legislation: 139 Organisations and over 140,000 Citizens Appeal to EU Agriculture Ministers and new EU Health Commissioner**

***Wake-up call to Ministers to save endangered crop species ahead of next week's AGRIFISH Meeting***

**Brussels, Schiltern – Today, 139 organisations from 23 European countries issued an open letter to the 27 EU Agriculture Ministers and the new EU Health Commissioner, Olivér Várhelyi, who is responsible for seed issues. Together, they call for urgent improvements to EU seed legislation, which is on the agenda for the next Council meeting on December 9–10. "The current legislative proposal poses a massive threat to the diversity of our cultivated plants and to the right of our farmers to use their own seeds" warn the organisations, together with the over 140,000 citizens who have so far signed the petition "Raise Your Forks for Diversity" ([www.raiseourforks.org](http://www.raiseourforks.org)).**

### **Broad Support from Civil Society**

The 139 signatory organisations include civil society and farming initiatives, regional seed businesses, as well as nature conservation and development organisations. The undersigning organisations include ARCHE NOAH, CIDSE, Oxfam, Solidagro, Slow Food, and the Belgian seed organisation Vitale Rassen. The organisations present four demands for the new EU seed legislation:

- The conservation and sustainable use of locally adaptable crop diversity is the over-riding priority.
- The human right of farmers and gardeners to harvest, use, exchange and sell their own seeds must be implemented fully.
- The marketing of diverse and locally adaptable varieties by regional seed producers must be facilitated.
- Newly approved varieties must not be dependent on pesticides or synthetic fertilisers.

The proposal put forward by the European Commission endangers European agriculture. Based on the proposal, activities aimed at saving rare varieties—such as the transfer of cuttings from endangered apple trees or sharing of endangered bean varieties— would be regulated as "marketing" for the first time. "Across Europe, gardeners and farmers work, often on a voluntarily basis, to preserve crop genetic diversity for present and future generations. These individuals contribute greatly to our food security. Yet, they are being punished with complex regulations intended for the commercial seed market," says Magdalena Prieler, seed policy expert at ARCHE NOAH. The draft legislation also restricts the right of farmers, enshrined in international human rights law, to share their own propagating material.

### **Background: EU Seed Legislation Under Discussion**

In July 2023, the European Commission presented a draft for new regulation on the production and marketing of seeds and propagating material (e.g. fruit tree cuttings or seed potatoes). In April 2024, the European Parliament called for improvements to protect agro-biodiversity and farmers' rights. The Agriculture Ministers' discussions are still ongoing. Triologue negotiations between the Commission, Council, and Parliament could begin in spring 2025 under the Polish Presidency of the Council.

The joint letter from the 139 organisations is addressed to the 27 EU Agriculture Ministers, the Hungarian EU Health Commissioner Olivér Várhelyi, the new Agriculture Commissioner Christophe Hansen, as well as

members of the EU Parliament's Agriculture and Environment Committees. The appeal was sent alongside the book *Eating to Extinction: The World's Rarest Foods and Why We Need to Save Them* by Dan Saladino. The book tells the stories of endangered plant varieties from around the world and highlights the importance of plant genetic diversity. These varieties are not only part of our history and culinary culture but are also key to resilient agriculture in the face of the climate crisis. "Endangered varieties contain important traits which could enable our farmers to adapt to changing and more extreme weather conditions.... Their survival literally hangs on a thread – a thread that can be easily broken if new legislation or regulations don't fully consider the value of this diversity" comments Saladino in a note accompanying the book. The Swedish foundation Naturstiftelsen provided funding to enable the purchase of the books.

"As a broad alliance, we call on Agriculture Ministers colleagues not to succumb to industry's pressure, but to lay the foundation for a sustainable, resilient, and diverse food system," conclude the organisations.

**For the Open Letter:** [https://www.arche-noah.at/media/joint\\_letter\\_on\\_plant\\_reproductive\\_material.pdf](https://www.arche-noah.at/media/joint_letter_on_plant_reproductive_material.pdf)

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