



For immediate release

Six-fold increase in organic seeds needed in the next ten years in Europe Second European Organic Seed Policy Conference shows pathways to make organic seeds a reality

The Spanish Presidency of the European Union put a spotlight on rural areas and agricultural resilience during a High-level Rural Policy Forum taking place in September 2023. Meanwhile, European and national policymakers, experts, and leading organisations of the organic seed sector gathered in Poznań (Poland) to discuss the roadmap to 100 % organic seed of adjusted cultivars in Poland and the European Union. This conference was organized by the European Union co-funded project LiveSeeding and its partners from Poland. The LiveSeeding project promotes the growth of organic seed and plant breeding for the transition to more sustainable local food systems.

Keywords: EU organic day, Farm2Fork, Green Deal, organic farming, organic seeds, organic plant breeding, organic heterogeneous material, organic varieties, EU organic regulation *EU 2018/848*, *EU NGT regulation*, *EU seed law*, Polish elections, Spanish Presidency of EU High-level Rural Policy Forum

(Poznań and Brussels, 4 October 2023). The 2nd **European Organic Seed Policy Conference** took place on 29 September 2023 in Poznań, Poland. It provided an opportunity to share experiences among participants and discuss how to boost the organic seed and plant breeding sector in Poland and throughout Europe. While European legislation requires the use of organic seeds in organic agriculture, the lack of availability of organic seeds leads to the continued use of derogations for non-organic ones, slowing down progress in meeting this legislative goal. The European Commission has set the ambitious objective to completely phase out derogations by 2035.

“To reach 100 % organic seed use in organic farming, we need a six-fold increase in the production of organic seeds in the next 10 years. Such a massive increase will only be possible by joining forces,” says **Dr. Monika Messmer, plant breeding expert at FiBL Switzerland**. *“Leading organisations across the sector are working together under the EU co-funded innovation project LiveSeeding to help overcome the practice of derogations and make organic seeds a reality everywhere in Europe”*, she added.

Also, the European Commission has proposed a reform of the seed marketing legislation to harmonize and merge the various legislations and rules on seed production into one regulation. LiveSeeding project partners are working intensely on organic breeding and organic variety testing. On the basis of their scientific and market experience, LiveSeeding Consortium members welcome the draft seed legislation because 1) it provides testing of organic varieties under organic conditions in all Member States as well as room for flexibility for organic varieties registration; 2) it sets a broader definition of new and traditional conservation varieties, which will allow more genetic diversity on farms; 3) it allows in-kind exchange of seeds among farmers and; 4) it allows the commercialisation of heterogeneous material by simple notification.

Yet, the LiveSeeding Consortium is concerned about the fact that the introduction of vegetable and fruit VSCU (value for sustainable cultivation and use) testing could restrict and slow down market access of organic seeds. Under current legislation, VCU testing is compulsory only for arable crops. The current draft proposal would extend these additional tests to fruits and vegetables. This would result in



additional costs, further delays in registration and slower uptake of organic seeds, which would hold back the organic sector.

Organic agriculture has been at the forefront of transitioning our agricultural systems to sustainable practices, which are resilient to adverse climate conditions, foster biodiversity and are beneficial for human and planetary health. The respect of the precautionary principle is paramount to maintaining consumers' confidence.

While the European Commission's proposal explicitly prohibits New Genomic Techniques (NGTs) from organic production, it does not provide a clear basis to protect GMO-free and organic production with co-existence measures nor to ensure a fair distribution of risks and burdens.

"The Commission's proposal to deregulate New Genomic Techniques (NGTs) does not support an evidence-based and systematic approach to agriculture and innovation. It is a distraction from the agroecological solutions needed to move agriculture towards sustainability," according to **Eric Gall, IFOAM Organics Europe deputy director**. Also, *"exempting certain NGTs from risk assessment, traceability and labelling would be a step backwards for biosafety and consumer information, and is unlikely to bring any benefit for sustainability. Therefore, we urge Member States and the European Parliament to maintain traceability for NGTs all along the production chain and to provide organic breeders, farmers and processors with the means to avoid the presence of NGTs in organic production"*.

"The Seed Policy Conference provided a great opportunity for different stakeholders to define together the roadmap to 100 % organic seed in Poland," says **Dr Edward Gacek, honorary Director of COBORU, the Polish National Variety Office**, adding, *"We want to encourage organic farmers to buy high-quality seed of locally adapted varieties as this strengthens the organic sector in Poland"*.

The 2nd European Organic Seed Policy Conference took place after the LiveSeeding annual meeting. Sixty delegates from 37 partners convened in Poznań from 26 to 28 September 2023 to plan their future work. LiveSeeding is a 4-year innovation action co-funded by the Horizon Europe programme, Switzerland and the UK. With a budget of 6.6 million euros, the project aims to boost the organic sector by delivering high-quality seeds of a broad range of cultivars for a wide range of crops across Europe.

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Background information

About LiveSeeding

LiveSeeding is a 4-year Innovation Action on organic seed and plant breeding to accelerate sustainable and diverse food systems in Europe, which started in October 2022. LiveSeeding provides science-based





evidence and best practice solutions to help achieve 100 % organic seed. The project has a budget of 6.6 million Euro, funded by the European Union, the Swiss State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI) and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI). To deliver on such an ambitious goal, LiveSeeding brings together 37 organisations from a wide range of sectors operating in 16 European countries.

LiveSeeding contributes to the transition towards environmentally friendly, climate-neutral, healthy and fair food systems through a PUSH-PULL-ENABLE strategy to

- Enhance the availability and adequacy of organic seeds of cultivars appropriate to organic farming (**PUSH**),
- Increase and stabilise the market demand for organic seeds of cultivars appropriate to organic farming (**PULL**),
- Foster an enabling policy and regulatory environment where both demand and supply can harmoniously and productively negotiate without irrelevant constraints due to legal restrictions and/or regulatory fragmentation (**ENABLE**).

LiveSeeding works with a **holistic multi-actor, multi-stakeholder, participatory approach** involving stakeholders along the value chain in:

- **17 local Living Labs** (LLs), where innovation will be co-generated involving the whole value chain, from breeders to consumers and citizens;
- **3 established networks** of organic breeders (ECO-PB), seed savers (ECLLD), and Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (MUFPP).
- **15 focus crops** will be used **within Living Labs** in breeding, cultivar testing and seed production, namely: 4 cereals (wheat, rice, oat, maize) and 1 pseudo-cereal (buck-wheat), 1 oilseed crop (sunflower), 4 grain legumes (broad bean, lupin, beans and soybean), 4 vegetables (pepper, carrot, tomato and brassica) and 1 fodder crop (alfalfa).

These activities take place in **15 European countries** covering different pedoclimatic zones and socio-economic contexts, including countries with a low level of development in organic seed and breeding in Eastern and Southern Europe.

To learn more about the project please follow us on: www.liveseeding.eu



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<https://www.facebook.com/LIVESEEDING/>



<https://www.linkedin.com/company/liveseeding-project/>



About FiBL

The Research Institute of Organic Agriculture FiBL is one of the world's leading research institutions in the field of organic agriculture. FiBL's strengths are interdisciplinary research, joint innovations with farmers and the food industry as well as rapid knowledge transfer. The FiBL Group currently includes FiBL Switzerland (founded in 1973), FiBL Germany (2001), FiBL Austria (2004), ÖMKi (Hungarian Research Institute of Organic Agriculture, 2011), FiBL France (2017) and FiBL Europe (2017), which is jointly supported by the five national institutes. Around 400 employees work at the various locations.

Homepage www.fibl.org

About IFOAM Organics Europe

IFOAM Organics Europe is the European umbrella organisation for organic food and farming. For 20 years, it has been and continues representing organic in European policymaking and advocating for a transformation of food and farming. Its work is based on the principles of organic agriculture – health, ecology, fairness and care. With almost 200 members in 34 European countries, the work spans the entire organic food chain.

Homepage www.organicseurope.bio

About COBORU

COBURU is the Polish National Variety Office. Its mission is to stimulate the innovation in plant breeding and seed and to support the application of plant variety progress into agriculture.

Homepage www.coboru.gov.pl

About PIN

Polska Izba Nasienna (PIN), the Polish Seed Trade association associates and represents breeding, seed production companies and distributors of seed in Poland. Currently, it brings together 85 national and foreign affiliates, representing about 80 % of the market for agricultural, vegetable and fruit seeds

Homepage pin.org.pl

About PHR

Poznańska Hodowla Roślin Ltd. (PHR) is a seed cultivation company which specialises in cultivation and seed production of wheat, legumes and grasses.

Homepage phr.pl