

DRAFT

**STATEMENT ON NEW BREEDING TECHNIQUES
(NBTS)**

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European agriculture is facing many challenges. It will have to meet an increasing demand on food, feed and non-food outlets. These outlets include the increasing demand for plant proteins, brought about by changes in food consumption models and a second food transition in Europe, and the new demand for raw materials to produce bio-based goods. The European agricultural sector will have to meet all of these demands with only scarce natural resources, whilst also reducing its greenhouse gas emissions. More frequent and severe weather events due to climate change further complicate this scenario. The European agricultural sector will have to be able to better deal with these changing and unfavourable weather conditions, and thus be even more resilient to climate change. The COP 21 agreement in Paris changes the rules on climate change mitigation and the adaptation of the European agricultural sector. Additionally, in its chapter on food security and agricultural production systems, the IPCC¹ report on climate change underscores the need to breed new plant and animal features, such as resistance to water and heat stress, as a way to adapt to climate change.

The question begs as to how we can ensure that EU farmers and their cooperatives are equipped to tackle these challenges and how they will be able to produce more in an even more sustainable manner.

1. The economic development of European agriculture needs to go hand in hand with environmental and climate protection, thus responding to society's concerns.
2. Productivity is a major challenge for European agriculture. Productivity also greatly contributes to farmers' profitability, as it helps them generate a higher income from the available materials and inputs, and can cut production costs, which are higher in Europe than elsewhere in the world.
3. The CAP is not the only policy that affects agricultural productivity. Several European decisions on crop protection or plant health also have an impact on the competitiveness of the European farming sector, such as the recent decision to ban neonicotinoids, or setting sanitary thresholds for mycotoxins. Additionally, the repercussions of the recent decision by 19 Member States to make use of the GM crops opt-out remain to be seen.
4. Agricultural crop production begins with seeds and reproductive material. It is essential to ensure that farmers can access high quality seeds and reproductive material that are well adapted to local conditions. Seed quality must meet farmers' needs and society's demands.
5. Organic farming also uses a large number of varieties that are the result of modern breeding techniques, such as hybridisation. Restrictions that apply to breeding techniques for seeds that will be used in organic production actually run counter to the development of organic farming, as there are more and more restrictions placed on production methods.
6. New Breeding Techniques (NBTS) are very important tools to support innovation in the plant breeding sector and in the agricultural sector as a whole. Indeed, they have a fundamental role to play. NBTS develop rapidly. What's more, the report from the European Commission's Member State Expert Group that was set up in 2012 does not cover all currently available NBTS, such as CRISPR-CAS 9 and TALEN.
7. NBTS offer many new possibilities in plant breeding. For instance, they make it possible to precisely edit plant genes, thus allowing the development of new functions to optimise existing features or identify and develop new traits. By permitting a greater use of genetic

¹http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar5/wg2/WGIIAR5-Chap7_FINAL.pdf

variability and a better use of existing genetics, NBTs can provide solutions to the numerous challenges faced by European agriculture.

8. Conventional plant breeding takes between seven and ten years, and generally only results in minor improvements to existing traits. Faster plant breeding is therefore important, because market demands change considerably over a 10-year period. NBTs allow breeders to develop plants and animals that are similar to those that stem from conventional breeding methods, but quicker. They are therefore vital tools that make it possible to accelerate the process, thus replying to the various needs of farmers in a better and quicker manner.
9. NBTs contribute to developing varieties that use fewer inputs, improving the quantity and consistency of yields, adapting to climate change, producing sufficient and high-quality food, and diversifying crops for production in order to optimise crop rotations.
10. NBTs go hand in hand with other technological developments, such as precision farming, digital farming, robotisation, and bio-control. However, innovative developments that stem from these techniques can only be shared if the costs of evaluating them and regulating their placing on the market are acceptable and proportionate to the size of the target markets.
11. In some regions, yields for certain crops have hit a ceiling. European farmers and their cooperatives have serious concerns about their access to innovation in seed breeding. If the EU were to regulate all products that result from NBTs according to legislation on GMOs, NBTs would cease to develop in Europe, as small and medium-sized enterprises in the sector would not be able to shoulder the costs of evaluating them and deciding on a regulatory approach under Directive 2001/18/EC. This could lead to a higher concentration in the seed sector and changes to the relationship between breeders and farmers. Similarly, it is vital for public research institutes to be able to access NBTs.
12. Unlike farmers elsewhere in the world, European farmers would no longer be able to benefit from these new developments. The products obtained from these NBTs would however still be imported, as Europe is one of the major importers of agricultural raw materials.
13. Each NBT should be scientifically analysed and discussed, and the decision taken should be proportionate to the risks.
14. The report from the 2012 Member State Expert Group concluded that the legal definition of GMOs does not apply to most NBTs and that these techniques should be exempted from the rules of Directive 2001/18/EC. Seeing as they do not differ from plants obtained by means of conventional breeding (e.g. sexual crossing or mutagenesis), plant products that result from these NBTs should therefore fall under the scope of the directive on marketing seeds. The European Commission should include the majority of NBTs in the general exemption for mutagenesis set out in Annex 1B to Regulation 2001/18. The report from the 2012 Member State Expert Group also revealed that the experts agreed that in certain cases, changes resulting from cisgenesis could be obtained via conventional breeding processes. It is therefore necessary to continue the debate to exclude cisgenesis from the rules of Directive 2001/18/EC, under certain conditions.
15. In conclusion, Copa and Cogeca call on the European Commission to:
 - Create a regulatory environment that is favourable to NBTs and improve legal certainty so that plant breeding companies can develop innovative projects to market.
 - Ensure that research, development and innovation projects on NBTs are not outsourced outside of the EU, and that public research institutes can continue to enjoy access to these new techniques.
 - Ensure that European farmers have access to the advantages and progress made by NBTs.