

# Draft seed-regulation threatens agricultural biodiversity

**Following today's release of the Commission's proposal, European civil society organizations fear negative consequences for the environment and biodiversity, global food security and consumers' choice and transparency**

**Brussels, 07/05/2013** – *“The proposal for the new EU seed marketing regulation is a big disappointment with regard to seed diversity, despite the EU Commission's announcement to better take into account agricultural biodiversity and consumers' demands”,* say NGOs after a first analysis after its release on Monday. *“We now urge the Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and the Council to take steps for substantial improvement.”*

The proposed regulation is hallmarked by the corporate agro-industrial lobbying efforts. It primarily aims at forcing productivity and focusses on industrial export-oriented agriculture. Other stakeholders' demands are not considered sufficiently.

**Scope leaves little room for non-commercial activities:** The legislation on Plant Reproductive Material (PRM) sets out the rules for the marketing of seeds and other propagation material. Different from the current legislation, the new regulation applies to all kinds of transfers, even if free of charge, and is not limited to the marketing of seeds *with a view to commercial exploitation*. As a consequence, the industry-compatible rules will be enforced on all participants of formal or informal seed systems.

**Niche-market handled too restrictive:** Despite the fact that the Commission introduced a new derogation for individuals, small actors for the marketing of “niche market material” and old traditional varieties, these remain far too restrictive and are not sufficient to prevent the negative effects on small actors, seed savers and diversity farmers and seed diversity itself.

**Important decisions left to Delegated Acts:** An important amount of legal provisions and derogations is being delegated to the EU Commission, diminishing the space for democratic control, whilst the scope of action and the derogation possibilities for Member States are minimalized.

**Sustainability in danger:** *“With this proposal that puts productivity and control over resilience and diversity, we risk to miss a very important chance for improving the EU seed policy towards social and environmental sustainability. To respond to the pressing challenges our food systems are facing, the EU seed legislation urgently needs a 'Greening'. The availability of a broad range of varieties bears the potential to support the delivery of ecosystem services from farm land and to reduce the amount of inputs such as water, chemicals and pesticides.”* says Heidi Porstner, agricultural campaigner of Friends of the Earth Austria / Global 2000.

**Diversity without future?** Piero Sardo, President of the Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity, is concerned that the disappearance of local seeds will go hand in hand with the disappearance of small farmers who are the guardians of seed diversity, local food cultures, and traditional knowledge. *“Seed is the base of agriculture. It molds the farming systems same as the final products. In order to protect biodiversity and the practice of food*

*sovereignty, it is thus necessary to firmly reassert the value of traditional seeds and find a solution to curb their loss on at a global scale.”*

Christian Schrefel, chairman at the seed savers organization ARCHE NOAH, analyses: *“Seed diversity will be banned to micro niches, limited by quantitative, geographic or historic restrictions [articles 36, 57]. Following the proposed rules, local seed savers may exchange their seeds but not take a cent for it [article 2], whilst farmers may face fines if they pass on their farm saved seeds.”* Schrefel adds: *“The best way to improve cultivated biodiversity would be to have no mandatory registration for open pollinated varieties at all. Because it cannot be proofed that this bureaucratic regulation really serves the public interest.”*

Antje Kölling from the IFOAM EU Group misses a stronger commitment to introduce rules for the marketing of plant varieties with a broader genetic spectrum ('heterogeneous material'). *“The provisions concerning population varieties (Article 14.3) are not more than an option - we demand a firmly grounded commitment for open pollinating and population varieties to have a solid stand within this regulation.”* Varieties with a wider genetic basis are essential to conserve and improve the capacity of food production systems to adapt successfully to changing environmental conditions. Any plant material stemming from GMOs or from patented breeding techniques must be excluded from the possibility to be registered under this special category.

**Farmers under threat:** Karin Ulmer from APRODEV: The criminalisation of farmers owned seed systems will be exported to third countries through the EU equivalence system and specific export agreements. Especially in developing countries, where farmers' seeds still are the sole basis for local food systems, the consequences of such EU PRM legislation will be even more devastating, putting at risk traditional farming systems and women farmers who feed 70 percent of the world's population, including the most vulnerable. The regulation must recognize the rights of farmers to save, reuse, share, sell and protect their seeds, as stipulated in the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture

**Civil society organisations now call on the European Parliament and the Council to make this regulation more respectful towards the environment, consumers' expectations and the needs of small actors in the seed chain or take the opportunity and abolish all bureaucratic rules that can no longer be justified.**

**In May 2012, more than 250 civil society organisations already addressed the EU Commission and the European Parliament in an Open Letter: [www.SeedForAll.org](http://www.SeedForAll.org)**

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APRODEV is the association of major European development and humanitarian aid organisations that are closely related to the World Council of Churches. Its 15 member organisations have an annual income of some € 720 million and their partners organizations can be found in most parts of the world. The main objective of APRODEV is to influence EU decision-making processes as these affect developing countries in order to promote justice and peace, and the eradication of poverty. [www.aprodev.eu](http://www.aprodev.eu)



**Arche Noah:** For more than 20 years and with over 6.000 accessions in its seed bank, ARCHE NOAH and its 10.000 members have been preserving and cultivating endangered vegetable, fruit and grain diversity. It successfully works on bringing traditional and rare varieties into gardens and on the market again, like many seed savers associations throughout Europe. [www.arche-noah.at](http://www.arche-noah.at)



**ARC2020** is a multi-stakeholder civil society platform of over 150 civil society networks and organisations within 22 EU Member States, all pushing for a paradigm shift in agriculture and a rural renaissance within the CAP reform framework. ARC2020 represents diverse issues and interests from nature protection, human health and animal welfare, to development cooperation, global justice and climate change, as well as those of conventional and organic farmers and rural development networks. <http://www.arc2020.eu/>



**GLOBAL 2000 (Friends of the Earth Austria)** is an independent Austrian environmental organization. Since 1982, GLOBAL 2000 has been working on controversial social themes to uncover potential hazards for humans and the environment. GLOBAL 2000 is a member of Friends of the Earth, the largest international network of environmental organizations. To reach our goals, we cooperate with other environmental organizations, citizens' initiatives, independent action groups and selected corporate entities. [www.global2000.at](http://www.global2000.at)



The **IFOAM EU Group** is the European working level within the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements. It brings together more than 300 organisations, associations and enterprises from all EU-27 and EFTA countries. IFOAM's goal is the worldwide adoption of ecologically, socially and economically sound systems that are based on the principles of Organic Agriculture. [www.ifoam-eu.org](http://www.ifoam-eu.org)



"Save Our Seeds" is a European Initiative of more than 300 organisations from all EU Member States and over 300.000 EU individual citizens to keep seeds free from genetically engineered material and to maintain further develop their diversity. SOS stands for the freedom of citizens and farmers to save, exchange, improve and replant their seeds. [www.saveourseeds.org](http://www.saveourseeds.org)



Slow Food Foundation  
for Biodiversity

The **Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity** is a non-profit organization which coordinates numerous projects (Presidia, Earth Markets, vegetable gardens and more) in support of Terra Madre communities, providing them with technical and financial assistance. The Foundation works in over 50 countries and involves over 10,000 small-scale food producers, promoting environmentally and culturally sustainable agriculture. [www.slowfoodfoundation.org](http://www.slowfoodfoundation.org)

[www.avenirsem.ch](http://www.avenirsem.ch)

**SOWING THE FUTURE!**

Sowing the future! is an initiative based in Switzerland to raise awareness for organic seeds, food and farming. By sowing a field together we challenge the need of GM crops. Since the first sowing event in 2006 the number of events per year has steadily increased and by 2012, has reached two hundred sowings in twelve different countries. [www.avenirsem.ch](http://www.avenirsem.ch)