Subject: Joint position paper of the European Cooperative Programme for Plant Genetic Resources and the European Regional Focal Point for Animal Genetic Resources on the proper consideration of Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture in the reform of the Common Agriculture Policy of the European Union

Dear Mr Flavio Coturni,

We are writing with regard to the ongoing reform of the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) of the European Union (EU) and its interaction with Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (GRFA) in Europe.

In its Biodiversity Strategy, the EU has declared a strong commitment for the conservation of biodiversity. Beyond this, the International Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is also an important driver for policy-making in the EU, e.g. within the framework of Natura 2000. However, biodiversity exists not only in the wild. In the abundance of different agro-ecosystems in Europe, a rich diversity of GRFA has evolved during centuries. Much traditional knowledge and many cultural events depend on utilization of local GRFA. In addition to the importance of GRFA as a cultural heritage, the manifold links of GRFA to local economies contain an enormous potential for the rural development in the EU. Furthermore, local GRFA are often closely linked to valuable ecosystems and to High Nature Value Farming (HNVF). However, many of these GRFA are at risk of getting lost as a result of agricultural development. To keep this diversity of GRFA as an important resource for sustainable and innovative agriculture, Global Plans of Action (GPAs) for Plant and Animal Genetic Resources have been agreed at international level.

In the year 2015, these GPAs have been complemented by the adoption of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). SDG 2 particularly concerns agriculture, which shall, inter alia, conserve and use the diversity of GRFA in a sustainable manner.

The European Cooperative Programme for Plant Genetic Resources (ECPGR) and the European Regional Focal Point for Animal Genetic Resources (ERFP) appreciate the EU’s efforts for the conservation and sustainable use of GRFA. In particular, the Agri-Environmental and Climate Measures (AECM) of the CAP, the R&D programme Horizon2020 and the funding of two Preparatory Actions on plant and animal genetic resources within EU have effectively supported the implementation of the CBD and the GPAs in the Union. In addition, we acknowledge the important efforts of the EU Member States in supporting conservation activities of GRFA via different payments in the agricultural sector and in rural areas. However, a future CAP also needs to consider the adopted SDG 2.
Therefore, we wish to draw your attention to the relevant recommendations of the first Preparatory Action on EU plant and animal genetic resources. In our view, many of these recommendations will facilitate the achievement of SDG 2 and strengthen the conservation and sustainable use of GRFA.

A key recommendation of the Preparatory Action concerns the effective implementation of the AECM on the conservation and sustainable use of GRFA, notably by reducing the administrative burdens for farmers, given their pivotal role in the conservation and sustainable use of GRFA. It should be emphasised, that due to economic disadvantages under the current framework conditions, rare GRFA are very often maintained by sideline and hobby farms. Restricting certain CAP measures to “genuine farmers” by the Member States may risk bypassing relevant stakeholders for the valorisation of rare GRFA, and would remain largely ineffective.

Furthermore, the first Preparatory Action (and an ERFP Task Force on Agri-Environmental Measures) recommended, in addition to the AECM, the support of collective actions to utilize rare GRFA and complementary strategies to achieve results in the long term. In the second Preparatory Action on EU plant and animal genetic resources, support measures for collective actions to valorise rare GRFA were successfully tested in four pilot projects. During the Final Conference of the second Preparatory Action, the four pilot projects were presented and this funding scheme has proven to be very effective in developing value chains in rural areas. In addition to valorisation projects, actions for the documentation and the data management are a key issue of the conservation and sustainable use of GRFA and need public support.

Position of ECPGR and ERFP

From our point of view, it is necessary to expand the efforts for the conservation and sustainable use of GRFA in the new CAP in order to achieve the United Nations SDG 2.

In order to address the demand for support for collective actions to valorise rare GRFA, the support scheme successfully tested in the second Preparatory Action on EU plant and animal genetic resources, should be perpetuated in the new CAP (or alternatively in a separate programme for GRFA). Actions for the documentation and the data management of GRFA should also be supported.

In this sense, we value as highly positive the preservation in the regulation proposal on the financing, management and monitoring of the CAP, the possibility of the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF) supporting the conservation, characterisation, collection and utilisation of GRFA. We encourage European institutions to develop the mechanisms and regulation to make this possibility feasible.

In addition, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) should be maintained and extended, specifically, to the support of conservation, utilisation and valorisation of GRFA.
Measures for the conservation and sustainable use of rare GRFA should not be limited to “commercial farmers”. The administrative burden and requirements, especially for farms with a pivotal role in the conservation and sustainable use of GRFA, must be reduced.

ECPGR and ERFP wish to renew their offer for further consultation in order to develop an appropriate CAP in line with the Convention on Biological Diversity, the respective FAO’s GPAs for Plant and Animal Genetic Resources, and the United Nations SDG 2.

Thank you in advance for your kind consideration of our joint position paper.

Yours sincerely,

On behalf of the European Cooperative Programme for Plant Genetic Resources

Eva Thörn (Chair of the ECPGR Executive Committee)

On behalf of the European Regional Focal Point for Animal Genetic Resources

Sipke Joost Hiemstra (Chair of the ERFP Steering Committee)

Attachments:
Final report of the first Preparatory action – EU plant and animal genetic resources