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MEPs call on EU to support a competitive plant breeding sector

The European Parliament is urging the European Commission to boost investment in EU plant breeding research to help Europe's farmers meet future food needs and cope with climate change.

This week, MEPs adopted a report¹ from the Agriculture Committee highlighting the critical importance of having an effective and competitive European plant breeding industry, and calling on the Commission to step up its efforts to create a coherent and long-term framework for plant breeding research in the EU.

In particular, the report highlights the need for higher-yielding varieties to meet increased demands for food and feed, and for plant breeding research to focus on developing crops with improved resilience to more extreme weather conditions and new disease challenges.

It also calls for more effective partnerships between government, the research base and industry in key areas such as pre-breeding and maintaining plant genetic resources, and urges the Commission to develop an overall strategy on agricultural inputs, with a key focus on plant breeding, to support the development of agricultural productivity and sustainability within the EU.

Welcoming the report, which MEPs backed by more than three to one in a full vote of the European Parliament, BSPB chairman Dr Richard Summers said:

“This report recognises the key role of plant breeding as the essential platform for sustainable, efficient agriculture, and highlights some of the key challenges facing our sector in terms of return on investment, regulation, access to skills and new breeding techniques.”

“Above all, it recognises the need for consistent, long-term research funding to reflect the timescales involved in developing a new variety, and the case for increased public sector investment in the fundamental pre-breeding and translational research needed to ensure advances in basic plant science transfer into improved varieties, traits and breeding tools.”

“Such explicit support for Europe's plant breeding sector reflects a growing recognition by politicians, scientists and farmers alike that continued progress in crop genetic improvement - delivered to market by the commercial plant breeding and seeds sector – is critical to meeting future food security and sustainable development goals.

“The challenge now is to ensure these encouraging words translate into concrete action through improved collaboration between public and private sector and increased investment in plant breeding research,” concluded Dr Summers.

Notes

1. *Report on plant breeding: what options to increase quality and yields?* (2013/2099(INI)) from the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development (Rapporteur: Marit Paulsen MEP) – was adopted in Plenary by the European Parliament on 24 February 2014.

About BSPB

The British Society of Plant Breeders (BSPB) is the representative body for the UK plant breeding industry. Acting on members' behalf, BSPB licenses, collects and distributes certified seed royalties and farm-saved seed payments on agricultural and horticultural crops. The Society represents members' interests on technical, regulatory and intellectual property matters, and works to promote continued innovation and investment in UK plant breeding. For further information visit: www.bspb.co.uk

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