

NEWS RELEASE

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New EU study highlights benefits of plant breeding

Plant breeding innovation in Europe over the past 15 years has delivered major benefits for food production, economic growth, environmental protection and sustainable development, according to a new EU-wide study.

Commissioned by the European Technology Platform Plants for the Future (Plant ETP), the report by economic consultants HFFA Research GmbH, entitled '*The economic, social and environmental value of plant breeding in the European Union*', identifies key areas in which the positive contribution of EU plant breeding can be measured and calculated, for example:

Higher yields

Across major crops cultivated in the EU, plant breeding has contributed around 74% of total productivity growth since 2000, equivalent to a yield increase of 1.24% per annum;

Economic growth

Through higher yields, more efficient input use and improved crop quality, genetic improvement has added more than €14 billion to the EU's GDP, including €8 billion to the agricultural economy;

Improved farm incomes

1.2 million farm workers in Europe earn €7,000 more per year on average thanks to innovation in plant breeding;

Increased food supply

Since 2000, access to improved crop varieties has enabled EU farmers to produce enough extra calories to feed up to 200 million more people;

Biodiversity and habitats

Without plant breeding innovation in the EU an additional 19 million ha of farmland would be needed to maintain crop production levels – equivalent to the combined arable land of the Netherlands, Belgium, Ireland, Portugal and Spain;

Reduced GHG emissions

Plant breeding advances have supported a 3.4 billion tonne reduction in CO₂ emissions over the past 15 years.

Welcoming the report, BSPB chief executive Dr Penny Maplestone said: “This study is the first of its kind to quantify the contribution of European plant breeding innovation, not only in supporting the productivity, efficiency and competitiveness of EU crop production, but also in securing wider policy objectives on issues such as food security, climate change and biodiversity preservation.”

“But future innovation in EU plant breeding cannot be taken for granted, and will depend on continued public sector investment in relevant plant science research and an effective framework of IP protection, as well as a supportive regulatory environment.”

“On key issues such as GMOs and novel breeding techniques, for example, EU decision-making has become highly politicised and unpredictable. The findings of this study should serve as a wake-up call to Europe’s policy-makers that fostering a science-based and enabling regulatory environment for plant breeding is an important investment for the economy, the environment and our future food security.”

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Notes to editors:

The full report, entitled *‘The economic, social and environmental value of plant breeding in the European Union’* by HFFA Research GmbH can be downloaded via the Plant ETP website at:

http://www.plantetp.org/images/stories/stories/documents_pdf/HFFA_Research_Paper_03_16_final_protected.pdf

The report’s key findings are also summarised in a series of infographics available to download via the Plant ETP website at:

http://www.plantetp.org/images/stories/stories/documents_pdf/IPGs_pages1-20%20compressed%20002.pdf

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