

The future of the European animal breeding and reproduction sector - Ana Granados Chapatte

15 October 2018



In a recent press release the European Forum of Farm Animal Breeders (EFFAB) announced their new Director, Ana Granados Chapatte. Against this background, we got in touch with her to talk about recent developments on new breeding technologies in the European animal breeding sector, its future, and how it is affected by the current regulatory framework in the European Union.

What is your impression of the [ECJ ruling](#) stating that “organisms obtained by mutagenesis are GMOs and are, in principle, subject to the obligations laid down by the GMO Directive”?

The responsible use of technology is a requisite for the animal breeding sector and the biotechnology sector in general. Thus, it is our obligation to provide the European society with the best quality products possible while simultaneously protecting the environment. However, the outdated regulatory framework that we are currently confronted with, hampers the possibilities to achieve those objectives. Traditional methods, which are exempted from the GMO Directive, are not able to provide the precision, trustworthiness and reliability new mutagenesis techniques do.

The enforcement of the new regulation has been passed on to Member States level. They can individually regulate the exempted conventional breeding techniques for which no harmonising EU rules are in place. Since there are momentarily no clear guidelines for the enforcement of the regulation, it might lead to discrepancies between Member States, affecting the trade between companies and especially SMEs.

As the Director of EFFAB, can you explain to us how the ruling affects the animal breeding sector?

It is too early to evaluate quantifiable effects or consequences. We need still more research. Nevertheless, it is safe to say that companies as well as research institutes working on animal breeding all over Europe will face issues to capitalise from their research. Amidst the ECJ ruling,

the entire sector could lose the ability to develop solutions for animal diseases or human and animal health. My overriding concern as a European, though, is that future innovations are going to be seriously affected.

To what extent will it influence research and development in Europe and the competitiveness of the biotechnology sector?

In order to finance research, products need to enter the market, which became significantly more difficult with the current regulatory framework. Some stakeholders, who welcomed the ECJ ruling, are not aware that it makes it more difficult for small and medium-sized companies to lead their activities with GMO procedures. The SMEs which, until now, contributed remarkably in terms of research and innovation are deprived from their chance to establish a sustainable business model due to a lack of resources to face those additional hurdles.

On the other hand, there are consumers' concerns that should not be appeased but rather addressed in a responsible manner. In a similar vein, also technology must be used in a responsible way which is why a regulatory framework, protecting consumers, the environment and Europe as a whole, is essential.

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Ana Granados Chapatte, Director of EFFAB and General Secretary of FABRE TP

How will trade with countries outside of the EU be affected?

The European market will face dire consequences in the future because of the uncertainty that comes with the import of products, like for instance semen. There are currently no accurate methods to detect the applied breeding technique. This further means buyers as well as consumers need to trust that the information provided by suppliers about the respective commodity is accurate and meets the quality standards and legal requirements of the EU. The legal framework should ensure this transparency. Therefore, we at EFFAB consider the ECJ ruling a missed opportunity for Europe to remain a competitive producer of high-quality products. When talking about long-term effects, investment in research will decrease, leading to Europe forfeiting its leading position in innovation.

What could be a way forward for Europe and what is your approach for the future within EFFAB?

Amid the Brexit negotiations, the current regulatory framework could also have [profound implications for the United Kingdom](#) with regards to meeting the challenges of human and animal health and environmental protection. However, the extent of this has yet to be seen, as it strongly depends on future developments. Regardless of that, European innovations are going to be used elsewhere and scientists as well as companies are going to leave the EU to carry out their research in another region. Hence, the ruling will have a profound impact on competitiveness, food security, the environment, agriculture and consumer concerns like animal welfare.

It is important to communicate objectively and precisely about the potential new breeding techniques have and what a responsible use of those techniques implies. We need to engage in a constructive dialogue and bridge the gap between science, companies, politics and consumers by laying out unbiased evidence which already provides the required history of safe use,

demanded by the Directive 2001/18. At the same time, we need to build a legal and regulator framework, facilitating as well as embracing responsible and safe innovation in Europe.

[Ana Granados Chapatte](#) is the new Director of the European Forum of Farm Animal Breeders (EFFAB) since 1st July, 2018. At the same time, she also became General Secretary of the Farm Animal Breeding & Reproduction Technology Platform (FABRE TP). She was educated at the Polytechnic University of Madrid as agronomist in zootechnics. After her study she worked for the Belgium cattle breeding cooperative organisation AWE for 12 years, the first 4 years as researcher and the last 8 years as head of the bovine semen production laboratory and quality manager. Since 2012 she has worked as animal production and sustainability advisor for the Walloon Farmers Union.

What is plant breeding?

Plant breeding is the art and science of changing the traits of plants in order to produce desired characteristics to improve the overall function of various plants and crop systems.

With the predicted growth in the global population and the effects of climate change, varieties with increased yields and resistance to drought and disease are critical if we are to provide enough food for future generations. Plant breeding is one of the tools that will help us achieve sustainable crop production in the long term.

About the NBT Platform

The NBT Platform is a coalition of SMEs, large industry representatives and members of prominent academic and research institutes. Its aim is to provide policy makers and stakeholders with clear and precise information on NBTs and to generate awareness about their benefits for the European economy and society.

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