

Plant breeding innovations as a way to solve future challenges for the European agricultural sector - Mr. Thor Gunnar Kofoed

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The European agriculture sector needs crops that are resistant to stress factors like pests, and diseases as well as fast-changing climatic conditions while increasing yields and remaining competitive. According to Mr. Thor Gunnar Kofoed, Chairman of COPA-COGECA Working Party on Seed, this will only be possible when farmers have all the right tools.

What is the status of EU agriculture right now?

The economic development of European agriculture needs to go hand in hand with environmental and climate protection. Productivity and profitability are major future challenges and the reformulation of the CAP is likely to make farmers lives more difficult. The rise of precision farming and precision breeding will help farmers to respond to future challenges and use natural resources more wisely.

How does COPA-COGECA support farmers considering those future challenges?

We at COPA-COGECA believe that farmers and breeders need to be increasingly innovative to deal with the challenge of feeding a growing world population with limited resources and increasingly variable weather events. The European agricultural sector will have to meet all of these demands with only scarce natural resources, whilst also reducing its greenhouse gas emissions.

Hence, European farmers need access to new plant varieties that are well adapted to local conditions. Plant breeding innovation contributes to developing varieties that use fewer inputs, improving the quantity and consistency of yields, adapting to climate change, producing sufficient and high-quality food, and diversifying crops for production in order to optimise crop rotations.

However, for investments to be made and for plant breeding techniques to be developed further, legal certainty is essential.

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Mr. Thor Gunnar Kofoed - Chairman for COPA-COGECA Working Party on Seed

What is your view on the current legal framework for agriculture in the EU? Does it hamper economic growth and R&D?

Well, there is a lot of uncertainties when it comes to the use of plant breeding in the EU. At the moment the European Court of Justice (ECJ) is in the process of providing legal clarity to the use of certain biotechnologies and the recently published [Advocate General's opinion](#) is a step in the right direction.

Once legal certainty is reached, those techniques could be deployed immediately to respond to the numerous challenges which lie ahead. In the case of an unfavorable ruling, European society would not be able to benefit from the progress made by innovative techniques for their own production.

Mr. Thor Gunnar Kofoed (Chairman of [COPA-COGECA](#) Working Party on Seed & Member of the Danish Agricultural Council). The Committee of Professional Agricultural Organisations (COPA) and the General Confederation of Agricultural Cooperatives (COGECA) have together reinforced their position as Europe's broadest farming representative organisations with an overall membership of 76 organisations from EU Member States. Their objective is the development of the European model of multifunctional and sustainable agriculture.

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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