

Meanwhile in Europe

New Chain Initiative for GMO - and Patent-Free Seeds

THEO BOON

An initiative group consisting of players in the organic chain aims to achieve a qualitatively and quantitatively good supply of freely available open-pollinated varieties through a structured supply chain approach.

This is particularly urgent because our freedom of choice is threatened by new European legislation, which allows genetically modified seeds to be patented and marketed without labeling. The initiators want to safeguard the future of our agricultural biodiversity and the independence and freedom of choice of both farmers and consumers.

A new initiative for diversity in organic seed stock

We advocate for organic seed, free of chemicals, genetically modification, and patents – and thus aim to maintain and promote agricultural biodiversity and free choice of a diversity of varieties.

To guarantee this in the long term, this initiative group strives for the widest possible range of open-pollinated varieties. Everyone can harvest the seeds of open-pollinated varieties and reuse them as we see this as the best guarantee that multinational agrochemical and seed companies will not further monopolise our seed.

To achieve a range of high-divers open-pollinated varieties, we not only need well-willing breeders and growers, but we also need support from the entire (organic) food chain and everyone who shares these values. We are starting by forming a coalition of the willing with **three main goals:**

1. Increasing the market share of organically produced open-pollinated varieties.
2. Ensuring the continuity of organic breeding with alternative financing methods based on fairness principles.
3. An initiative that aims to involve all links in the seed propagation/ breeding chain: farmers, traders, outlets, and consumers.

We will achieve this by:

1. Bringing together a network of breeders and seed producers focused on a diversity of breeding

programmes for a wide range of organic and open-pollinated varieties.

2. Optimally unlocking and encouraging the use of open-pollinated varieties, and testing and improving this through variety trials.
3. Developing long-term financing models for breeding programmes.
4. Implementing communication activities to raise awareness and engage businesses in the food chain and consumers.
5. Establishing international cooperation.

Why is this more important now than ever?

The accessibility and freedom of choice of seeds in agriculture are at stake. Europe is about to release the new generation of genetic engineering techniques (NGTs), which act directly upon DNA level of plants, and market such genetically modified food without labeling – and thus unrecognisable for consumers.

Fewer and Fewer Seed Companies

Agriculture has become increasingly dependent on a shrinking number of large seed companies, often selling seed in combination with agrochemicals, which want to apply these NGTs. Despite European restrictions, even native plant traits are increasingly being patented, meaning that starting material for further breeding is no longer freely available to smaller seed companies that cannot and do not want to obtain licenses to use these patents.

Without an adequate response to this development of increasing technological and costly way of breeding, we will see more monocultures and less diversity in the fields and on our food plates.

And a smaller supply of organic seeds.

The introduction of NGTs strengthens patentability of seeds. Patents thus hinder global free exchange of seeds

and narrow down the genetic base of our food. This reduces the diversity of the supply, which affects both our food security and food sovereignty! Free choice from a variety of breeds is the basis for a diverse food supply. In short, the availability of GMO- and patent-free seeds is becoming an increasing challenge for those consumers aiming for GMO-free food and for the organic sector in particular.

The initiative will be presented to the organic sector stakeholders in Holland at the Dutch Biofach Fair between the 14-15 April 2026. After securing finance, the aim is to present the plans at the Agriculture Conference in 2027.

Initiative Group

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