



Researchers, companies and legislators ask for an urgent change in the EU legislation on Plant Genomic Techniques in a symposium organized by HARNESSTOM

- An online Symposium took place on May 12 with the participation of leading scientist and companies in which they acknowledged the importance of plant genome editing for the EU and Spanish Agrofood sector
- The event included the participation of the Spanish Minister for Science and innovation of the Spain

The symposium "Genomic Editing of Crops: Beyond Science" took place on May 12 and brought together more than 400 virtual participants, among them prominent scientists, experts in Law and representatives of the Spanish agri-food sector, to review the status of genomic editing and its application to agriculture. Coordinated by leader Antonio Granell, the symposium was Organized by the Spanish section of EU SAGE (an alliance of more than 130 scientific societies and European research centers) and BIOVEGEN-Plataforma Tecnológica de Biotecnología Vegetal (association of 135 companies and research centers in plant innovation). The symposium was hosted by the Spanish Confederation of Business Organizations (CEOE), and counted with the inauguration of the event by the Minister of Science and Innovation, Pedro Duque, and with José Antonio Sobrino, Deputy Director General of the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Environment for the closing ceremony "Spain has leading research groups in crop genetic editing, which are making relevant contributions, but unfortunately many of these developments cannot be brought to market in Europe due to the barriers posed by the current restrictive legislation. It is necessary that Europe removes these barriers as soon as possible". This was explained by Antonio Granell, researcher at the Institute of Molecular and Cellular Plant Biology (UPV-CSIC) and organizer of the symposium during its presentation.

During the symposium, the state of the art of genomic editing and its application to agriculture was reviewed. The social, economic and sustainability consequences derived from the introduction of a more restrictive or permissive regulation were also discussed. Likewise, the ethical, legal and competitiveness derivatives were analyzed by experts in different disciplines, including representatives from the field of research, business, economics and bioethics

Gonzaga Ruiz de Gauna, director of BIOVEGEN, pointed out that the productive sector needs to innovate to develop new varieties and to compete on equal terms. "Furthermore, genomic editing is a key technology in order to reach the productivity and sustainability objectives of the agri-food sector set out in the European strategy 'From Farm to Fork. It would be very difficult to understand that a technology so beneficial for the entire value chain, from the producer to the consumer, can be used in other advanced countries such as the US, Canada or Japan, where it is not subject to strict regulation, but not in Europe, forcing the agents of the value chain to travel to third countries to apply it".

European Commission consultation

This symposium took place two weeks after the European Commission published the results of a study on the impact of plant genomic editing. As a result of this study, the





Commission will initiate consultations with member countries, seeking their opinion on whether the current legislation, which dates back more than 20 years, is adequate in view of the challenges posed by gene editing and processing. important role that new improvement technologies can play in innovation in the agri-food sector.

"The regulation must protect innovations at the same time as the interests of citizens and the environment but must adapt to new technologies. There are mechanisms to adapt the current legislation, ie. exempting gene editing from the over-regulation of transgenics, as it does with plants improved by physical or chemical mutagenesis. Or to elaborate ad hoc legislation for the edited plants, it is a question of political will", stated Felipe Palau, Professor of Mercantile Law at the UPV and moderator of the session on social, economic and legislative aspects of the symposium.

According to a recent report published by CAJAMAR, the agri-food sector in Spain, including distribution, contributed 102,983 million euros to the Spanish economy in 2019, which is equivalent to 9.1% of gross added value, and generated 2,397,279 jobs , 11.8% of the national total. Even though these values are higher than the European average, our country invests less in R&D&i concerning agri-food than the EU-28 average.

"A specific investment aimed at facilitating the development and incorporation of new technologies to improve the Spanish productive fabric through public-private consortia would allow us to achieve a leadership role in this strategic sector for our country," said Toni Granell.

The Symposium highlighted the potential and high degree of development of these techniques to address the productive and environmental challenges facing the EU, as well as the excellent scientific and business resources that Spain has to participate in such development.

The urgent need of the European productive sector to be able to access these technologies and their derived products on equal terms with the rest of the farmers worldwide was also stressed. In this sense, decision-making mechanisms analogous to those already implemented in other developed countries were proposed in order to implement a legislation more in accordance with scientific and technological evidence that can be implemented in an agile manner.

More information:

<https://biovegen.org/eventos/simposio-edicion-genomica-cultivos/>

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Snapshot of the Opening Ceremony of the Symposium. Pedro Duque: The Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation (left); Antonio Granell: coordinator of HARNESSTOM and also representing EU-SAGE (centre); Pedro Mier: President of I-D-I in CEOE





Snapshot of all speakers in the Symposium



Panel Members for Session I: Pere Puigdomenech (CRAG), Lluís Montoliu (CNB), Antonio Granell (IBMCP), Francis Mojica (UA), Francisco Barro (IAS) and Diego Orzáez (IBMCP)



Panel members for Session II: Gonzaga Ruiz de Gauna (BIOVEGEN), Felipe Palau (UPV), Gabino Sanchez (HBT), Cesar Gonzalez (Euroseeds), Pilar Iñiguez (UA), Leire Escajedo (HSU) and Antonio



Wrap up session and conclusion with Jose Antonio Sobrino (MAPA)