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Three EPSO Statements on Agricultural Technologies

The EPSO positions and statements on Crop Genetic Improvement Technologies, Plant Breeders Rights and Patent Rights, and the Member State Exemption for GMO Cultivation were published on 26.2.2015. They will be utilized for discussion at European level (e.g. in our collaboration with the European Commission and the European Parliament), and as EPSO members find appropriate by them as well. We were pleased that our positions were mentioned in a [Nature editorial](#) on 9th April 2015.

In the [statement on crop genetic improvement technologies](#) for a sustainable and productive agriculture in order to address food and nutritional security, climate change and human health, EPSO asks the European Commission as a matter of urgency to provide a guideline document that follows the recommendations of the Member States expert working group (the “New Techniques Working Group”) to provide legal certainty for science and industry. Since an increasingly number of new breeding techniques will be developed, a more detailed and comprehensive discussion on a new approach for the regulation of new plants is required, based on the properties and potential benefits of the novel characteristics of a product/trait. Since current European legislation neither reflects the progress made in new crop genetic improvement approaches nor the positive economic, social or environmental impact of the resulting biological outcomes, the European Commission should create favourable regulatory conditions for the European plant breeding sector. Therefore the European plant science community calls upon policy makers to implement a science-based policy as a priority.

In the [statement on plant breeder's rights and patent rights](#) EPSO underlines that developing high-performing plant varieties requires substantial investment of skills and technology and that those who develop such varieties are entitled to earn a reward. On the other hand it is essential to maintain the breeder's exemption, by which breeders can make crosses to the commercial varieties of their competitors, and go on to breed new varieties with novel gene combinations. The academic exemption for breeding and genetics with commercial varieties should also be maintained. These exemptions must also apply to varieties generated by New Plant Breeding Technologies including GM.

In the [statement on GMO cultivation - national opt-out](#), EPSO emphasises that the proposed change in policy will enable Member States to opt-out of planting a GM crop on political or cultural grounds.

EPSO welcomes the Commission-proposed change in authorization for opt-out by Member States on other than scientific reasons, which was approved with some modifications by the Member States and the European Parliament and came into force on 31 March.

Member States should not be in a position where i) they feel they must block the whole EU from adopting a technology just because they do not wish to adopt it themselves, ii) they question the scientific assessment done

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by EFSA. It is essential that the EFSA remains the final authority in the science-based assessment about the merits or otherwise of any particular GM event proposed for planting in Europe.

They were developed in four steps: Drafts 1 were extensively discussed at the [EPSO Agricultural Technologies Working Group](#) Meeting in October 2014; Drafts 2 were discussed at and by email after the [EPSO Board](#) Meeting in November 2014; Drafts 3 were the final drafts for approval of the [EPSO representatives](#), sent in February 2015 for replies and finalized by the authors to be published on the EPSO website.

Contacts: [Joachim Schiemann](#), [Jonathan Jones](#)



EPSO Activities

Update on Horizon 2020 – Stakeholder input towards a strategy and Work Programmes for 2016/17

The European Commission, in collaboration with the Member States, is developing the Horizon 2020 Work Programmes 2016/17 based on the EC's and Member States agencies' consultations and discussions. The publication of the WP 2016/17 is foreseen in September 2015.

EPSO as part of the Plants for the Future European Technology Platform engaged in this discussion at meetings with the European Commission, at our Working Group meetings and you in your own country to help shape a research and innovation programme for the best impact in terms of economy, science, society and global responsibility.

We will inform you as soon as the programmes are published in September.

In autumn this year, the Plants for the Future ETP will start developing input for the Work Programmes

2018/19, based on the recently launched Action Plans on Innovation, Research and Education (see page 3).

For such input as well as for your proposals to the published Work Programme it will become even more important to include supporting facts and figures on the social and economic benefits that plant research and innovation can have in future, looking at indicators such as human health, jobs, economic growth, global competitiveness, collaboration with developed as well as developing countries, as well as future national and multinational initiatives in these areas. Please contact us to get involved.

Contact: [Karin Metzloff](#) and [Uli Schurr](#)



The Working Group on Global Plant Research including Developing Countries met on 13th October 2014.

EPSO Representatives at the General Meeting will vote on EPSO priorities in 2015 and beyond – Gargnano, 21-23 June 2015



The EPSO Representatives will meet in Gargnano / Italy 21-23 June 2015 to debate and prioritise the EPSO activities for 2015 and beyond with their vote.

The meeting agenda was prepared by the [EPSO Board](#) at their meeting in Brussels, 25 to 26 March, which will also include: European and global research and science policy including the Horizon 2020 Programmes, engaging in the European Innovation Partnership Focus Groups and Operational Groups, Joint Programming Initiatives and ERA-Nets. We will also discuss collaboration in the Plants for the Future ETP to foster implementation of the Research, Innovation, Education Action Plans, a series of workshops on sustainable growth with the European Parliament and progress of the Global Plant Council and EPSO's work with Developing Countries.

Our representatives will exchange ideas in smaller groups in a first session on the Horizon 2020 – lessons learned from 2014 calls, mutual benefits among EPSO members and the EPSO draft submission to EC consultation on food and nutritional security. In a second slot of parallel sessions we will look at support for scientists themselves, such as how to better involve young and mid career scientists in EPSO, improve the gender balance in plant science, develop components for an Erasmus+ proposal for submission in 2016 and discuss whether there is added value in developing an ethical code of EPSO members in terms of publishing and research. EPSO members can still propose via their EPSO representatives two themes for discussion in the parallel groups.

Finally we will advance the science support activities of EPSO members by looking at the Fascination of Plants Day 2015 and 2017, recent and upcoming actions of several EPSO Working Groups and preparing the joint EPSO-FESPB Plant Biology Conference in Prague in June 2016.

Contact: [Karin Metzloff](#)

FESPB/EPSO Congress 2018 to be held in Copenhagen

EPSO and FESPB are pleased to announce that the FESPB/EPSO Congress 2018 will be held in Copenhagen from June 18-21 2018. The local committee consists of representatives from Plant Biotech Denmark (PBD) and Scandinavian Plant Physiology Society (SPPS).

A Plant Biology conference in Denmark in 2018 will be timely for several reasons. Plant research has become a high profile research area in Denmark and has been made an area of strategic focus at University of Copenhagen resulting in the investment of 2 new buildings and research facilities called the Copenhagen Plant Science Center which will be ready by 2018. At Aarhus University strong competences in both crop genetics and biotechnology and basic plant molecular biology including a Center of Excellence have been

merged in one Department.

Several cross national activities have been and will be initiated such as the public-private partnership "Crop Innovation Denmark" which is a partnership between breeders and plant scientists at universities. Similarly, the innovation partnership "Intelligent, sustainable and efficient plant production" will be funded and initiated as one of 5 high-profiled public private innovation partnerships in the beginning of 2015.

It is our hope that hosting the Plant Biology conference will be of mutual inspiration and benefit for the ongoing initiatives and the conference.

Contact: [Solveig Krogh Christiansen](#)



Results of the Second ERA-CAPS call

The Second ERA-CAPS Call was implemented in two steps; 142 pre-proposals were submitted, and 62 consortia that received the highest scores were invited to submit a full proposal by July 2014. The Review Panel met in November 2014 to rank the proposals. Subsequently, the delegation of funders looked into the recommendations of the panel and moderated the number of fundable proposals in view of the available funds. While the national negotiations were still ongoing at the time of writing, it is expected that 12 projects will be funded. The list of funded projects will be available in May through this [link](#).

The overall requested budget in the full proposal stage was 86.5 M euros and the proposals involved 292 teams, requesting funding from 15 funding organisations in 14 countries. Moreover, teams from 8 non-funding countries also participated securing their own funding. The research theme that was most commonly addressed by the proposals was food security followed by biotic/abiotic stresses and adaptation to a changing climate.

Grant Holders' workshop in May 2015

An upcoming activity of the ERA-CAPS Network is the Second Grant Holders' Workshop that will be held on 7/8th May 2015 in Lisbon. The aim of this workshop organised by the Portuguese Fundação para a Ciência e

a Tecnologia (FCT) is threefold. Firstly, the event will gather the Grant Holders funded through the First ERA-CAPS call and give them the opportunity to present the first outcomes of their projects. Secondly, the Grant Holders funded through the 2nd ERA-CAPS call will be invited to introduce their projects, and thirdly, the Grant Holders will be given the opportunity to network with each other and share resources, tools and information. While this is not a public event, a summary and presentations will be made available through the [ERA-CAPS website](#).



The Future of ERA-CAPS

While the funding from the European Commission for the ERA-CAPS Network comes to an end in May 2015, most of the ERA-CAPS members are determined to continue their successful joint actions in supporting sustainable collaboration in plant sciences through coordinating and funding excellent transnational research. It is expected that the future collaboration of the network will be based on a Memorandum of Understanding, and include the future launching of further ERA-CAPS calls among other activities.

Contacts: Coordination: [Paul Wiley](#) Communication: [Freia Van Hee](#)

National learned society heads met with EPSO under the Memorandum of Understanding to discuss mutual support of our activities

The national society heads met with Karin Metzloff from EPSO in Brussels on 27 February to see how best to support societies' and EPSO's activities, such as input to the Horizon 2020 programme, the Fascination of Plants Day 18 May 2015, the 2016 Plant Biology Conference in Prague, disseminating statements on science and on science policy, engaging in the Global Plant Council and participating in events EPSO will organise

in 2015/16.

Already 12 societies from Czech Republic, France, Germany (2), Poland (2), Scandinavia, Spain, Portugal, the UK (2) and Italy collaborate with EPSO under the MoU.

Contact: [Karin Metzloff](#)





**Fascination of Plants Day
2015**
18 May 2015, Worldwide



Contact [EPSO](#) to participate



EPSO General Meeting
21-23 June 2015, Lake Garda, IT



EPSO Representatives Contact
[Karin Metzloff](#) for more information
and to confirm your participation



EPSO/FESPB Conference
27 June—1st July 2016, Prague,
CZ



Contact [Jana Albrechtová](#) for
more information

About EPSO

EPSO, the European Plant Science Organisation, is an independent academic organisation that represents over 220 leading academic research institutes, universities and departments from 31 countries. Together they represent over 28 000 plant researchers and staff. In addition, EPSO has over 3100 personal members.

The mission of EPSO is to promote plant science and plant scientists, to represent plant scientists in discussions about future plant science programme priorities across Europe, to provide an authoritative source of independent information on plant science, and to promote training of plant scientists to meet 21st Century challenges in breeding, agriculture, horticulture, forestry, plant ecology and sectors related to plant science.

To achieve its mission, EPSO advises policy and decision makers at national and European level on science policy, as an independent body and as member of the Initiative for Science in Europe (ISE) and the European Technology Platform 'Plants for the Future' (Plant ETP). EPSO supports plant scientists via the EPSO conferences including support grants for junior and eastern scientists, workshops, tutorships and as information broker via EPSO News and its website.

EPSO's strategy is defined by the representatives at the General Meeting and further elaborated by the elected Board. Current Board members are José Pío Beltrán (President – ES); Cathie Martin (Vice-president—UK); Ton Bisseling (NL), Carole Caranta (FR), Aldo Ceriotti (IT), Svend Christensen (DK), Bruce Osborne (IE), Mark Stitt (DE), Tomas Vanek (CZ), and Robbie Waugh (UK).

EPSO's strategy is implemented by its members and staff. Contact us to join our activities:

- Science policy (EPSO, ISE, Plant ETP), members, observers, association relations: **Karin Metzloff**
- Accounts, EU projects: **Karim Trabelsi**
- Website, newsletter, communications: **Calum MacKichan**
- Meetings, office, database and personal membership: **Nathalie Franck**
- Internship Expert—science and science policy support, Oct 2014 - May 2015: **Heike Slusarczyk**

Since its creation in 2000, the organisation has become a strong advocate of plant research in Europe and an important voice articulating the contributions and needs of plant scientists at national and European levels and beyond.



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As the information provided in *EPSO News* can only be a selection, EPSO is happy to receive further and updated information for distribution.

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