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Press Release
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EU seed law: Industry attack on diverse seed production largely defeated

ARCHE NOAH: But every vote counts on NGTs to stop a flood of patents on seeds

Strasbourg, Vienna, Schiltern – A finale, but not an ending. Last night in Strasbourg, the trilogue negotiations on EU's new seed marketing rules came to an end. The industry's bid to undermine diverse seed production was largely defeated, and the new EU PRM Regulation brings some long-overdue openings for diversity. At the same time, however, the European Parliament's Environment Committee approved a wide-reaching deregulation of new genomic techniques (NGTs). The final vote will take place tomorrow, Wednesday in plenary. "*While the new seed marketing rules grant diverse and adaptable varieties equal access to the market for the first time, tomorrow's vote on NGTs and patented seeds poses a major threat,*" warns Paul Grabenberger, seed policy expert at ARCHE NOAH. "*We call on all MEPs to take part in tomorrow's vote – for freedom of choice and against patents on seeds. Those who do not vote are voting for patents!*"

ARCHE NOAH has successfully advocated for more diversity in fields and on plates. "*The previous restrictions on diverse, adaptable 'conservation varieties' to small quantities and their region of origin are a thing of the past, and new diverse varieties will be enabled for the first time,*" says Paul Grabenberger. "*ARCHE NOAH managed to prevent this new freedom from being limited to fruit and vegetables – which would have closed the door to new regional cereal breeding.*" More diversity will also be possible in home gardens. For the first time, diverse seeds can be sold directly to gardeners without costly testing requirements and industrial uniform standards.

Don't give away your potatoes!

ARCHE NOAH strongly criticises that the right of farmers, enshrined in international law, to exchange and sell their own seeds and plant reproductive material (PRM) was not fully implemented. In contradiction to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants (UNDROP), farmers in the EU will still not be allowed to sell their own varieties. Even the simple exchange of PRM will be subject to quantity limits and geographical restrictions – and is completely prohibited for some species, including poppy and potato. "*EU agriculture ministers denied farmers their fundamental rights. This is unacceptable,*" ARCHE NOAH states.

Despite minor improvements in yesterday's negotiations, new bureaucratic requirements for small-scale producers remain excessively high. Proposals to strengthen the sustainability of agriculture were significantly weakened during the negotiations. For example, official testing of new varieties will still be carried out using pesticides and synthetic fertilisers rather than under low-input conditions. There will be no mandatory rules on the cultivation of herbicide-tolerant varieties to prevent harm to agriculture and the environment, only optional provisions.

New GMOs: every vote counts tomorrow!

The impact these new rules on diversity will depends in part on tomorrow's vote on NGTs in the plenary of the European Parliament. A blank cheque for NGTs would lead to patented seeds becoming the norm in Europe. "*The experience in the USA shows that patents on seeds fundamentally change the market. Large corporations secure monopoly rights, for example on virus resistances, and thereby push small- and medium-sized breeders out of the market,*" warns Paul Grabenberger.

There was no vote on amendments that would have limited patents on seeds, owing to a lack of a majority in the committee. The amendments will be resubmitted for tomorrow's vote in the plenary, but a majority will again be necessary votes on the amendments to take place. ARCHE NOAH calls on all MEPs to take political responsibility, to participate in the vote, and to support votes on the amendments. Across Europe, over 200,000 citizens have sent protest emails, and hundreds have picked up the phone. "*The message is clear: Show up and take a stand. Without effective restrictions on patents, this regulation must not pass,*" says Paul Grabenberger.

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