

Brussels,
... / ... (2018)

FINAL MINUTES

Meeting of the Civil Dialogue Group "Arable Crops – COP & Seeds"

Date: 6 February 2018

Chair: Mr Jean-Michel ASPAR

Organisations present: All Organisations were present, except Birdlife, EBB, Fertilizers Europe and SACAR.

1. Approval of the agenda (and of the minutes of previous meeting¹)

2. Nature of the meeting

The meeting was non-public.

3. List of points discussed

Agenda Points:

COP

1-2) The European Commission presented the harvest estimates as well as the balance sheets for the marketing year 2016/2017 and 2017/2018, followed by a discussion on quality of the harvest 2017 and firsts projections for the 2018 harvest.

CELCAA underlined that for the sixth consecutive year it has been produced more than what has been consumed. This recurring situation is worrying for the whole agri-food chain. Moreover, European Member States' (MSs) are facing unprecedented climatic conditions, which is affecting their agricultural production. Cereals markets' prices are stable, causing troubles in the risk management.

COPA stated that the 2017 harvest has been a fairly good year. European countries are increasing their level of productions, with the black sea ones being in a good position. There is need to ensure a competitive environment for EU producers and a reflection has to be made on whether the infrastructure existing today within the EU are sufficient to withstand the internal market exchanges or if there is the need to improve them.

¹ If not adopted by written procedure (CIRCABC)

2017 signed a positive record for imports coming into the EU. COPA also underlined that farmers are facing an unbearable situation due to the fourth consecutive year of farming prices crunch.

COGECA reported the difficulties faced by Spain in cultivating Maize, leading to an increasing import demand, mainly from Ukraine and Brasil.

COPA stated that in Germany, although yields and crop quality have been good in the north and in the east regions, 2017 harvest was disappointing, because of the important precipitations and of the African swine flu, which affected livestock and the market demand.

COGECA highlighted the massive difficulties that Portugal has faced in 2017 and is still facing, having 90% of the country in drought and very low water reserves. Therefore, the spring crops may be seriously affected.

3) France AgriMer presented “Céré’Obs Tool”, an online platform which allows to follow the crops’ state of progress in France, with weekly updates. The system mirrors the USDA project “Crop progress and condition”.

The Chair pointed out that is a good example of cooperation throughout the agri-food chain and the data here regrouped are valuable for all the operators.

CELCAA stated that this database, even though cannot be considered entirely reliable, gives a good overall perspective on crops progress to the operators.

Following COPA inquires, France AgriMer provided the following information:

- The tool is freely accessible online but the website is in French.
- The tool is accessible also via mobile phone and anyone can check the progress of crops from one region to another.
- The data are collected thanks to field observation, therefore the collaboration with farmers is key.

IFOAM EU Group stated that it would be interesting to have readable and easily accessible data on different regions crops progress and corresponding climate conditions.

4) The Commission provided a preview of the Study on Storage Capacities and Logistical Infrastructure which will be issued in the following months.

CELCAA stated that when analysing the storage capacities, it’s important to look at the quantities but it’s even more important to focus on the quality of the storage. Although the economic return is not immediate it’s essential to invest in high quality storage facilities.

COGECA wondered where the German data on storage capacities were coming from, since they faced difficulties in having access to them.

FoodDrinkEurope too underlined the difficulties met in the past years to find reliable data on storage capacities.

The Commission replied that they hired an external contractor to provide such data and that he engaged with different stakeholders and with the German Minister of Agriculture to gather information and build reasonable estimations.

The Commission also stated that the facilities subject to the study are only those finalised to long term storage, no silos and no temporary storages are involved.

COGECA underlined that the sources of data used needs to be very clear for study's credibility sake.

IFOAM wondered whether the Study included organic certified storage facilities too.

5) The Commission presented the Protein Plan's Stakeholders Survey Questionnaire to be discussed among the participants.

The questionnaire will be the base to prepare the Commission report on a Protein Plan for Europe and will be opened for stakeholders' submissions in the following weeks.

FoodDrinkEurope stated that it would be useful to point out whether the plant protein sources mentioned in the questionnaire are genetically modified plants or not. In case no differentiation is made and both are included, it should be outlined.

COPA stated that a general question on pulses is missing and that some questions regarding plant's protein content and quality should be added.

IFOAM EU Group stated that the questionnaire should take into consideration the differences between organic and conventional protein plants productions.

FoodDrinkEurope added that the sector's contributors should also include subsectors to better frame the replies.

COGECA stressed that the Blair House Agreement is hampering protein plant production in EU and that we should free EU agriculture from this constraint.

CELCAA underlined that such a Survey cannot miss to address the environmental impact of protein plants production.

Via Campesina stated that protein plants production must be sustainable.

6) Donau Soya presented their programme to increase EU soybean's supply and sustainability.

The Commission wondered how the production of soy in Europe could potentially reach 15 million tonnes, as outlined in the presentation.

DONAU SOYA stated that in their projections also Ukraine is included.

COGECA asked which were the main challenges they were facing in promoting this plan to farmers and whether a collaboration with breeders and potential buyers was ongoing.

DONAU SOYA stated that they are working closely with the breeders to improve soya cultivation's quality and productivity. The main obstacle is the limited number of processing facilities for soybeans.

8) The Commission presented the Communication “The Future of Food and Farming” in the framework of the CAP post 2020 programme.

COPA-COGECA stated that with this new programme Europe may be abandoning the common approach to agricultural policies and wondered if greening issues were sufficiently considered.

The Commission stated that this programme is the result of realising that the “one size fits all” approach for EU agriculture has to be put aside giving the many differences among the member states’ agricultural productions. As regard greening, it is not easy to implement a wide policy on this topic but environmental issues and demands have been considered in the legal review.

8 a) The Commission presented the OMNIBUS Regulation delegated acts concerning greening and crop diversification.

10) AOB

The Commission presented the new application Advanced Gateway to Meetings” (AGM) to deal with meeting invitations, accreditations and reimbursement of travel expenses for Commission Committees and Expert Groups.

SEEDS

1-2) COPA COGECA together with ESA, shared some preliminary reflections on 2017 seed market situation and on seed market projections for 2018.

No seed statistics were presented.

COPA stated that the winter crops did not established as they should have, due to harsh weather conditions. Lack of availability of seeds was underlined.

ESA stated that in large parts of the EU there were no extreme weather conditions.

COPA added that in Germany the weather conditions of the last months were that severe that many seeds were not planted and will be then planted this spring. At this stage, no estimates for seeds are available. COPA do not have a complete overview of seed market situation in the EU. The Commission should ask to the Member States to provide their own national estimates so to collect them and share it with the farmers.

This data collection would be extremely valuable, allowing farmers to have an overview of the seed market situation in the EU.

This data could then be shared and discussed in a Market Observatory meeting.

3) ESA delivered a presentation on Plant breeding innovation, followed by a discussion.

COPA-COGECA stated that innovation in plant breeding should not be hampered and that these innovative techniques may play a key role to face current and future agricultural challenges. Moreover, the products bred through these techniques will reach

the EU market anyway through import, and EU farmers cannot afford not to have access to plant breeding innovation. However, a way to have production lines without plant breeding innovation shall be found to let farmers have freedom of choice.

Via Campesina stated that plant breeding innovations shall be considered and regulated as technique of genetic modification. Thus, they should be regulated under the EC Directive 2001/18 on genetically modified organisms, meaning undergoing traceability and labelling requirements.

ESA stated that plant breeding innovating can help overcoming the challenges that agriculture is facing. If the EU will close the door to these innovative techniques, regulating all of them under the spectrum of the genetically modified organisms Directive, the EU market competitiveness will be hampered, while other breeders and farmers around the world will have access to these innovations. There is no product obtained through plant breeding innovation on the EU market because there is no clarity regarding their legal classification. The delay in legally framing these techniques is also hampering investments. Other than the conventional agriculture, plant breeding innovation may also represent an added value for the organic sector.

9) The Commission presented the review of the legislative package for organic agriculture.

4 & -5) The Commission presented the state of play of the review of the EU pesticides legislation, introduced the Minor uses database's funding issue, the state of play of neonicotinoid restrictions and updates regarding EFSA's Bee Guidance Document.

COGECA stated that the restrictions on neonicotinoids are of a great concern for farmers because an effective alternative pesticide has not been identified yet. The need for these restrictions is not clear, considering that bees' mortality is still very high, even though the neonicotinoid's use has already been limited for some years now. Due to these restrictions farmers have faced many difficulties for the winter crops. When restricting the use of such substances the Commission should be first investigate whether other pesticides equally effective are available for farmers. In this respect, farmers are waiting to see the Commission Notice on the Bee Guidance Document, which hopefully will not be further delayed and will not entail further restrictions for the use of neonicotinoids.

Via Campesina reminded the fundamental importance of bees for pollination and crops growth. Neonicotinoids represent one of the biggest threat to bees' health.

COGECA reckoned the essential role played by bees for crops cultivation; however, neonicotinoids are not the biggest risk for bee's health. The high mortality of bees is mainly linked to the absence of flowers to pollinate. This problem is serious and it should be collectively addressed and discussed to build a strategy and find a solution.

6) The Commission presented the relation between patent on seeds and plant variety rights.

COPA expressed concerns regarding the potential patentability of plant varieties resulting from the application of plant breeding innovation.

COPA hopes that the use of these innovative techniques will not lead to patentability of plant varieties, also considering that the genetic intervention on the seed cannot be detected in most of cases.

VIA CAMPESINA stated that the link between plant breeding innovation and patents is ambiguous because it's not clear if the products bred through these techniques will end up being regulated as GMOs or not. Legal clarification is needed to understand if they will be patentable or not.

The Commission stated that they can only specify the scope of the patent Directive which is in force. The content cannot be extended or reduced and the characteristics to be proven to obtain the patent on seeds will not change.

COPA stressed that this Directive needs further clarification and that is essential to speak in one voice to avoid plant varieties to be patented.

7) The Commission presented the update on EU seed equivalence for third countries.

The Commission gave a short update on the situation of requests from third countries on EU equivalence on seed production and certification.

- Ukraine (cereals): the proposal for Ukraine is in the internal process, will be adopted by the Commission in the upcoming weeks and sent to the Council and the Parliament.
- Brasil and Moldova (fodder plant, cereal, oil and fibre or vegetable seed): the equivalence decisions have been adopted by the Commission and sent to the European Parliament and Council (where it is being discussed) and the process of public consultation has finished.
- Bolivia (sorghum and maize): the legal analysis has been carried out and an audit of DG SANTE will take place in 2018.
- India has made a request (for all species). The Commission asked Member States to provide assistance for screening the legislation provided by India.
- Jordan: they expressed interest in seed equivalence.

To grant equivalence the EU has to modify Council Decision 2003/17/EC where 12 non-EU countries are currently listed/authorized. This amendment has to go through a co-decision procedure (Council and Parliament).

COM described the different steps of this legal procedure, also in relation with the public consultations foreseen under the Better Regulation rules (importance of the 8 weeks public feedback mechanism).

8) COPA COGECA presented the glyphosate resistance issue, underlying the urgency to find alternative herbicides.

8. Conclusions/recommendations/opinions

n/a

9. Next steps

n/a

10. Next meeting

19th September 2018.

11. List of participants - Annex

Disclaimer

"The opinions expressed in this report represent the point of view of the meeting participants from agriculturally related NGOs at community level. These opinions cannot, under any circumstances, be attributed to the European Commission. Neither the European Commission nor any person acting on behalf of the Commission is responsible for the use which might be made of the here above information."

List of participants – Minutes

Civil Dialogue Group "Arable Crops – COP & Seeds"

Date: 6 February 2018

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1	Beelife	A. SALAZAR ABELLO
2	CEJA	L. GADDONI
3	CEJA	G. PASTRANA GARCIA
4	CEJA	S. ROBB
5	CELCAA (Chair)	J.-M. ASPAR
6	CELCAA	A. BORSTING
7	CELCAA	F. LUGUENOT
8	CELCAA	P. MITKO
9	CELCAA (Note taker)	L. SEGURINI
10	CELCAA	M. ZULUAGA ZILBERMANN
11	CEPM	F. LABORDE
12	COGECA	D. DEJONCKHEERE
13	COGECA	G. ROHRER
14	COGECA	G. SEEDLER
15	COGECA	T. SOLARSKI
16	COPA	L. ACTIS PERINETTO
17	COPA	M. BROWNE
18	COPA	N. FERENCZI
19	COPA	P. GALLARDO BARRENA
20	COPA	M. HAMBLY
21	COPA	L. JIROVEC
22	COPA	E. OLAH
23	COPA	J. PALHA
24	COPA	M. SCHULMAN
25	DONAU SOJA	U. BITTNER
26	ECVC	J.M. BENITEZ CASTAÑO
27	ECVC	G. KASTLER
28	ECVC	C. MATEOS GARCIA

29	EEB/BEE	J. RACAPE
30	EEB/BEE	A. SLABE
31	ELO	L. BACIU
32	ELO	A. LETIA
33	EURAF	D. ARIAS MARTINEZ
34	EURAF	F.J. RODRIGUEZ RIGUEIRO
35	EuropaBio	A. MERTENS
36	FranceAgriMer	C. CAUCHARD
37	FranceAgriMer	M-M MUCKENSTURM
38	Food Drink Europe	C. GROSBOIS
39	Food Drink Europe	P.L. PIANU
40	Food Drink Europe	J. PICARRA
41	Food Drink Europe	M-C RIBERA
42	IFOAM EU Group	A. THOERING
43	PAN Europe	M. DERMINE
	<i>TOTAL</i>	43