



Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety

2017/2116(INI)

11.12.2017

OPINION

of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety

for the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development

on a European strategy for the promotion of protein crops – Encouraging the production of protein and leguminous plants in the European agriculture sector (2017/2116(INI))

Rapporteur: György Hölvényi

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SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety calls on the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions into its motion for a resolution:

- A. whereas, historically, the European deficit in protein crops dates back to old international trade agreements, especially with the United States, which allowed the European Community to protect its cereal production but in return allowed duty-free imports of protein crops and oilseeds into the Union (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade and the 1992 EU-US Blair House Agreement); whereas this was accompanied by significant progress in the efficiency of protein crop production in third countries, leading to a competitive disadvantage for EU farmers, for whom protein crop production is not sufficiently attractive from an economic point of view;
 - B. whereas crops from Brazil, Argentina and the United States are not subject to the same environmental, health, regulatory and GMO-related constraints as European crops;
 - C. whereas legal certainty and the stability and coherence of European public policies are an essential part of any credible long-term protein strategy;
 - D. whereas in recent decades the Union has used three main levers to support the objective of European protein independence, namely voluntary coupled aid for protein and oilseed crops, EU biofuel policy and the conditionality of 30 % of direct support introduced by the last reform of the common agricultural policy (CAP) in relation to the implementation of greening measures, including the obligation to devote 5 % of arable land to ecological focus areas (EFAs) and the decision to allow nitrogen-fixing crops and catch crops;
 - E. whereas, owing to the small share of protein crop cultivation in the EU, the number of vegetable protein research programmes is falling, matched by a decline in training, innovation and the acquisition of practical experience in the EU; whereas a research policy is only likely to succeed if it is backed by medium- to long-term political commitments;
- 1. Recalls that the Union devotes only 3 % of its arable land to protein crops and imports approximately 70 % of its protein-rich animal feed – mainly from Brazil, Argentina and the United States – which largely consists of GMO crops; stresses that the promotion of protein crop cultivation is necessary in order to reduce the EU's import dependency and the carbon and environmental footprint of farming;
 - 2. Believes that the promotion of protein crop cultivation, as part of crop rotation, can also be a powerful tool in the transition towards more sustainable agri-food systems, supporting a shift from input-intensive monocultures with a high input of synthetic chemical products and high environmental impact, towards diversified agro-ecological systems, and can help to re-establish a favourable environment and increase pollinator dietary sources, which are an essential part of biodiversity;
 - 3. Stresses that the availability of statistics concerning knowledge of protein crop cultivation and trade, together with consumer preferences in this regard, as well as farmers' initiatives for the cultivation of protein crops and their impact on the environment, health and

nutrition, are essential for the launching, development, implementation and monitoring of a European protein crop promotion strategy;

4. Highlights the fact that protein crops include not only soya, but also grain and forage legumes, which can be grown in a diverse range of agro-climatic and soil conditions across Europe; notes that protein crops are used for food, in animal feed and as fuel; considers it important to promote the conservation and cultivation of indigenous varieties;
5. Recalls that the BSE crisis in the 1990s and the ban on using processed animal proteins in animal feed, as established in Regulation (EC) No 999/2001, has increased demand for plant-based protein in Europe; notes that alternative European protein feed sources, such as fishmeal, are used in the European fish farming sector;
6. Believes that conditions should be created for the development of a viable and sustainable domestic protein supply in the EU, which would not only bring economic benefits for farmers and producers of animal feed and food for consumers, but also a wide range of environmental and climatic benefits, such as the ability to fix nitrogen from the atmosphere, reducing both CO₂ emissions stemming from the production of synthetic chemical fertilisers, which is highly energy-consuming, and nitrous dioxide emissions occurring during the cultivation of leguminous protein crops, improving soil quality and water resource management, reducing disease levels resulting from continued monocropping, and protecting biodiversity; notes, furthermore, that combining cereals and protein crops on the same parcel – a common approach in organic farming – has proven to be useful and should not be marginalised;
7. Highlights that in crop rotation systems that include leguminous crops, the reproductive cycles of pests and pathogens are interrupted, thus reducing plant disease levels; notes, in addition, that biodiversity is also increased through the breaking up of monocultures;
8. Notes that leguminous crops attract pollinators, but that insecticides used on these crops may be fatal to pollinators;
9. Recalls that some 75 % of soybeans are used as feed for animals and that GM soybean is planted on over 90 million hectares worldwide – 82 % of the total surface for soy cultivation; recalls that in the US, the percentage of genetically engineered (GE) soybean is well over 90 %;
10. Recalls that the EU relies on massive imports of protein-rich feed materials, for the most part GM herbicide-tolerant soya, which is not desirable;
11. Stresses that overdependence on soy imports from the Americas, which are not subject to the same environmental health and regulatory standards as European crops, combined with increased soy protein demand from China, places Europe's security of supply in a vulnerable position, particularly in the context of growing demand due to an increasing global population and rising meat consumption;
12. Highlights that these imports entail a significant carbon footprint and give rise to serious environmental problems in source countries, such as deforestation, loss of biodiversity, ecosystem degradation, ecotoxicological effects, including on non-target species, and damage to the health of local workers, as well as a negative impact on land use in the

areas in which soy is produced;

13. Notes that the majority of GM soy imported into the EU has been made tolerant to one or more herbicides such as glyphosate, which are consequently present as residues in the imported food and feed;
14. Stresses that the EU would benefit from the large-scale production of protein crops by reducing its deficit in plant protein; recognises the significant obstacles arising from the relatively low yields of suitable legumes and their weak price competitiveness in relation to imported products;
15. Notes that cows and other ruminants have co-evolved with beneficial bacteria which convert grass and other vegetation into a protein-rich food source; stresses, therefore, that it is not desirable, from an environmental, health or economic perspective, to feed these animals with imported soya which has been transported long distances, given that local sources of feed could be used;
16. Notes that the shift away from ruminants feeding on forage, to feeding on imported soya and maize, has led to the destruction of rainforests, permanent grasslands, meadows and pasture, resulting in a devastating loss of biodiversity and a loss of carbon due to land use change;
17. Believes that in order to reduce dependency on imported soya, which is predominantly used for animal feed, pasture-based feeding in Europe should be encouraged and incentivised;
18. Notes that, in addition to pasture-based feeding, other grazing or foraging alternatives are also available on temporary grassland, such as grass-clover mixes and undersowing with leguminous crops, such as vetch, lupins and grain legumes such as alfalfa;
19. Supports the objectives of the European Soya Declaration and other initiatives to boost non-GM soya production and other protein crop cultivation in Europe, provided that, in practice, they are implemented responsibly and respect the aims of developing sustainable, socially just and ecologically resilient agricultural systems;
20. Stresses the need to arouse farmers' interest in protein crop cultivation;
21. Notes that in order to incentivise farmers to grow protein crops, the activity must be financially viable;
22. Recalls that the CAP has a decisive impact on farmers' decisions to grow, or to abandon, protein crops, and should therefore be used to its full potential in the context of European sustainability goals, and in accordance with the various initiatives concerning protein and leguminous crop production taken at national level;
23. Notes that the introduction of a voluntary coupled payment for protein crops has contributed to increased production in the Member States that apply it and calls on the Member States to make full use of it;
24. Believes that the upcoming CAP should include a payment for leguminous protein crops

and make better and more targeted use of protein crop-related tools, using incentives rather than punitive measures;

25. Believes that farmers should receive support for growing their own protein forage and having animals on pastures, as this would improve their self-sufficiency and lead to higher animal welfare standards;
26. Stresses that it is essential to create a level playing field for the production of leguminous protein crops in the Union and therefore ensure equal opportunities for farmers in all Member States;
27. Notes that, although the volume of protein crops grown in the EU is low at present, the Blair House Agreement remains in force; believes that the need for this agreement should be re-considered and notes, in addition, that there are WTO exemption clauses in place for socially and environmentally beneficial support measures;
28. Believes that once it has been in force for a few years, useful lessons could be learnt from the recent ban on the use of pesticides in EFAs;
29. Notes that the primary function of the ban on the use of pesticides in EFAs is to strengthen ecological processes by boosting biodiversity; notes, therefore, that the ban on pesticides in EFAs is in line with the legislative goals;
30. Recalls that the by-products of food and bio-fuel production and certain processed animal proteins represent important alternative sources of proteins for feed, and that their use should be promoted; stresses that biofuels form part of a circular economy when they are manufactured from by-products, waste or residues, take up a small proportion of farmland, are beneficial with regard to crop rotation and diversification and to making use of fallow land in accordance with the green measures under the CAP and do not, on their own, cause food prices to go up;
31. Highlights that legislation on processed animal protein is often outdated and should be made fit for purpose in order to create more room within the regulatory framework to facilitate the use of alternative protein sources, such as insect proteins;
32. Notes that the Commission's GLOBIOM study already incorporates the greenhouse gas benefits of co-production of animal feed with biofuels in the recommended indirect land use emission estimates;
33. Highlights that legumes are an important source of plant-based protein and therefore also play an important role in ensuring sustainable and healthy human diets; believes that the volume of high-quality, non-GM protein crops grown in the EU needs to be increased in order to satisfy growing consumer interest in, and demand for, plant-based diets;
34. Highlights the important role that dietary education can play in shaping food demands; stresses the need for the adoption of dietary guidelines at either EU or Member State level aimed at promoting a healthy diet while addressing the environmental concerns linked to food production;
35. Stresses that low global protein prices, challenging climate conditions, high input costs

and competition from protein crops coming from outside Europe are all challenges that need to be addressed;

36. Notes that, in the face of climate change, independent scientific research on the stabilisation of yields and on stress resistance is particularly relevant;
37. Recalls that, in order to make protein crop cultivation more attractive to EU farmers, research should also focus on yield, protein and alkaloid levels and on the development of more sustainable cropping systems, in particular those based on protein crop rotation;
38. Stresses that existing structures, such as the Farm Advisory System (FAS) and the European Innovation Partnership, could provide advice and training for farmers on protein crop cultivation, including in the context of crop rotation;
39. Supports the establishment of transparent product labelling systems based on certified production standards, such as the Danube Soya and Europe Soya standards;
40. Calls for the extension of GMO labelling rules to cover products issued from animals that have mainly been fed with GM feed;
41. Notes that knowledge dissemination, the exchange of good practices and market development are also sorely in need of investment; emphasises the importance of local and regional knowledge of soils and suitable legume varieties;
42. Stresses the need for innovation and development in management practices and techniques to combat weeds, pests and other factors that could negatively impact crop yield and growth.

INFORMATION ON ADOPTION IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

Date adopted	7.12.2017
Result of final vote	+: 45 -: 1 0: 1
Members present for the final vote	Marco Affronte, Zoltán Balczó, Ivo Belet, Biljana Borzan, Paul Brannen, Soledad Cabezón Ruiz, Nessa Childers, Miriam Dalli, Angélique Delahaye, Stefan Eck, Bas Eickhout, Karl-Heinz Florenz, Gerben-Jan Gerbrandy, Arne Gericke, Jens Gieseke, Julie Girling, Sylvie Goddyn, Françoise Grossetête, Jytte Guteland, Karin Kadenbach, Urszula Krupa, Peter Liese, Norbert Lins, Susanne Melior, Rory Palmer, Piernicola Pedicini, Pavel Poc, John Procter, Julia Reid, Michèle Rivasi, Annie Schreijer-Pierik, Jadwiga Wiśniewska, Damiano Zoffoli
Substitutes present for the final vote	Jørn Dohrmann, Herbert Dorfmann, Luke Ming Flanagan, Martin Häusling, Krzysztof Hetman, Merja Kyllönen, Gesine Meissner, Nuno Melo, Ulrike Müller, Gabriele Preuß, Bart Staes, Claude Turmes
Substitutes under Rule 200(2) present for the final vote	Norbert Erdős, Sven Schulze

FINAL VOTE BY ROLL CALL IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

45	+
ALDE	Gerben-Jan Gerbrandy, Gesine Meissner, Ulrike Müller
ECR	Jørn Dohrmann, Arne Gericke, Urszula Krupa, John Procter, Jadwiga Wiśniewska
EFDD	Piernicola Pedicini
ENF	Sylvie Goddyn
GUE/NGL	Stefan Eck, Luke Ming Flanagan, Merja Kyllönen
NI	Zoltán Balczó
PPE	Ivo Belet, Angélique Delahaye, Herbert Dorfmann, Norbert Erdős, Karl-Heinz Florenz, Jens Gieseke, Françoise Grossetête, Krzysztof Hetman, Peter Liese, Norbert Lins, Nuno Melo, Annie Schreijer-Pierik, Sven Schulze
S&D	Biljana Borzan, Paul Brannen, Soledad Cabezón Ruiz, Nessa Childers, Miriam Dalli, Jytte Guteland, Karin Kadenbach, Susanne Melior, Rory Palmer, Pavel Poc, Gabriele Preuß, Damiano Zoffoli
VERTS/ALE	Marco Affronte, Bas Eickhout, Martin Häusling, Michèle Rivasi, Bart Staes, Claude Turmes

1	-
EFDD	Julia Reid

1	0
ECR	Julie Girling

Key to symbols:

+ : in favour

- : against

0 : abstention