

## Summary Report

### **New genomic techniques (NGTs) in plant breeding – What will be their role in the transition to more sustainable agri-food systems?**

Co-organised by Plants for the Future ETP, Czech NTP (CTP P4F), MEP Michaela Šojdřová and MEP Marlene Mortler

**Event type:** Roundtable discussions (morning) and high level event (afternoon)

**Date and time:** 9 to 16:00 CET, 16<sup>th</sup> November 2022

**Location, venue:** Brussels, COMET Louise (Place Stephanie 20, 1050 Brussels)

**Short outline of event:** The event was organised in the context of the Czech presidency to the EU Council, with the aim to provide an open platform for discussions between stakeholders and policymakers with diverse opinions on plant breeding and NGTs, enabling the sharing of views and perspectives on the overarching needs and common goals for the transition towards more sustainable agri-food systems. The morning session was aimed at agri-food stakeholders and took the form of roundtable discussions. The afternoon session included the morning participants, policymakers and additional stakeholders. Following several remarks and presentations, a summary of the morning discussions was given, followed by a panel and open floor discussion.

## Morning session (9 to 12:30)

### I. Agenda

Welcome and explanation of activity by *Anna Gumbau (moderator) and Amrit Nanda (Plant ETP)*

Instructions for roundtables by *Anna Gumbau*

Roundtable discussions with *facilitators*

Coffee/tea break

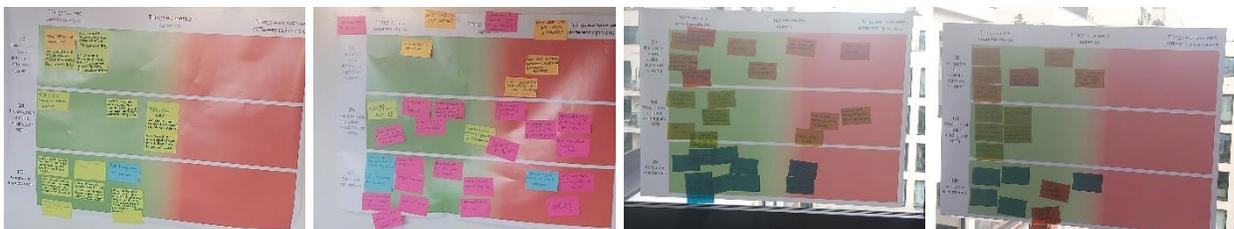
Reporting and final discussions with *all participants*

### II. Summary of morning session

A total of 15 researchers and representatives of agri-food value chains participated in the roundtable discussions. Each roundtable was made up of 3-4 participants, a facilitator and a notetaker.

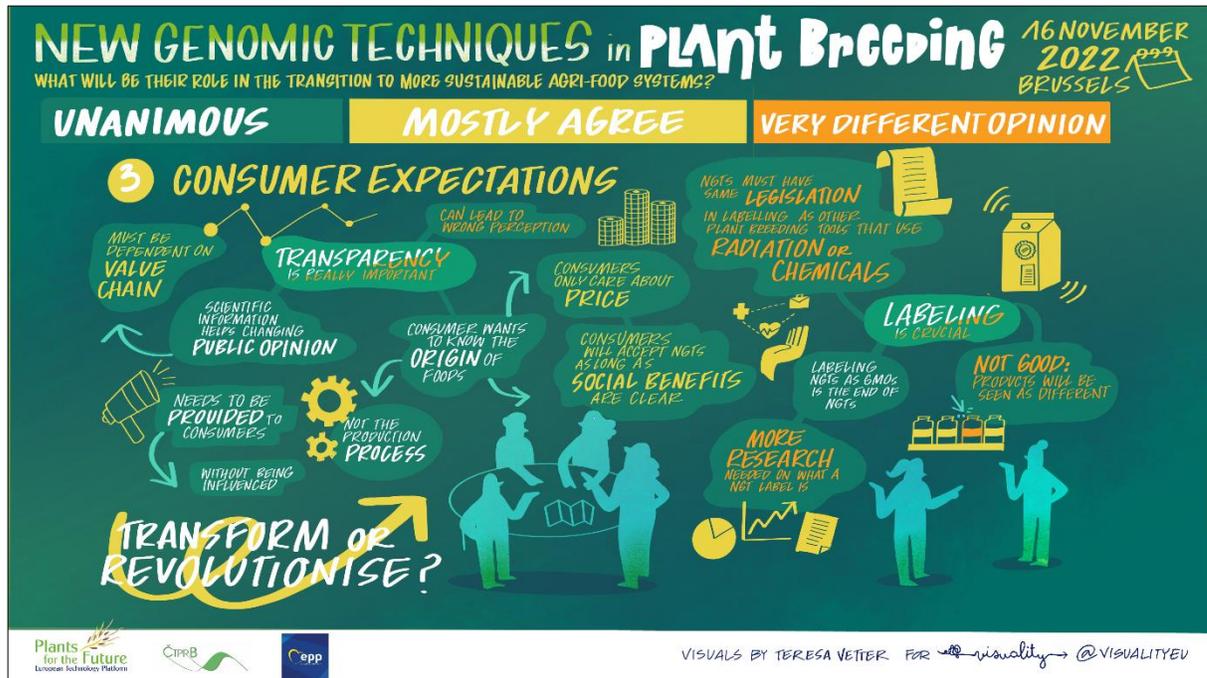


Discussions were organised in three rounds following three main topics: **1) The path to more sustainable agri-food systems;** **2) The potential of plant breeding and NGTs;** and **3) Consumer expectations.** For each topic, participants were presented with various statements and the level of agreement/disagreement was discussed. Participants were also encouraged to suggest additional statements to be discussed.



The discussions from all tables were aggregated into three sets of graphic notes.





Following the roundtable discussions, each table reported on their discussions, highlighting some key points of interest / open questions to follow up on:

1) The path to sustainable agri-food systems

- the lack of a clear definition and indicators defining sustainability was identified as a major issue, as it is difficult to chart a direction without it
- the transition to more sustainable agri-food systems will have considerable upfront costs for value chain players and governments
- environmental sustainability goes hand in hand with socio-economic sustainability
- the concept that Europe should consider the global picture, as it is a major exporter to third countries, and that reducing EU production could result in offshoring its environmental footprint
- the possibility of trade dynamics and trade deals as barriers to the transition
- using NGTs might raise ethical concerns, but so does not using them

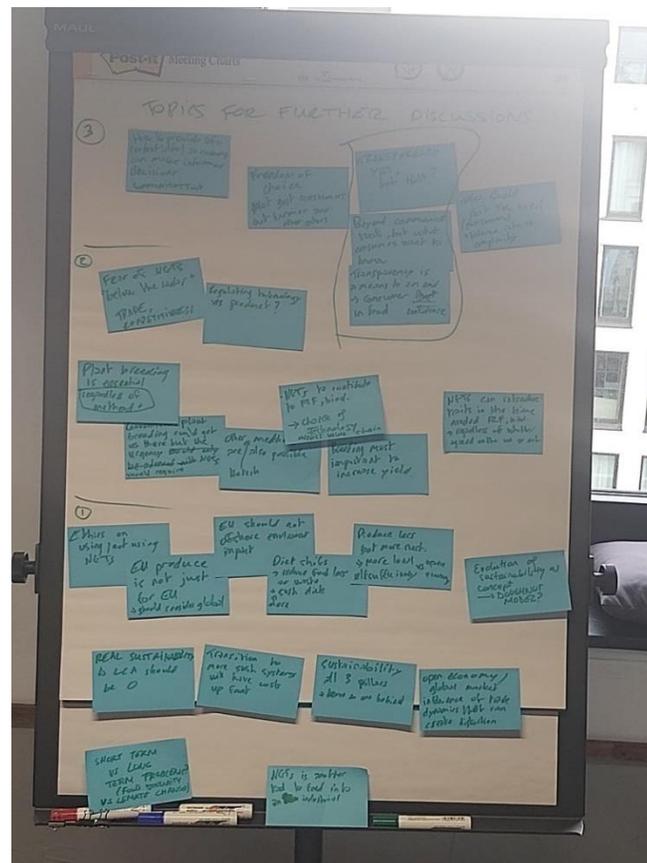
2) The potential of plant breeding and NGTs

- Plant breeding is essential, regardless of the methods used, and is key to increasing crop yields
- Conventional plant breeding might get us there [EU Green deal goals], but it is a very long process (10 to 30 years depending on species). The urgency requires the use of NGTs
- NGTs can help introduce traits that can contribute to the Green Deal’s F2F and Biodiversity goals, e.g., secure yields while reducing needs for input (e.g., fertiliser, plant protection products)

- NGTs are not the silver bullet and can complement current plant breeding methods
- The concept of regulating a technology rather than a product
- If NGTs are regulated like GMO in the EU, there will eventually be a risk of NGTs “below the radar” i.e., NGTs (containing) products could be imported into the EU without knowing

### 3) Consumer expectations

- The need to balance providing enough information for consumers to make informed choices, with the complexity of the topic
- Avoid over-reliance on the “public knowledge deficit model” (i.e., the public lacks knowledge and has to be informed or educated to improve the acceptance of NGTs). Rather aim for dialogues, taking consumers concerns serious, showing benefits and allowing consumers to gain experience with NGTs to increase awareness and confidence
- Freedom of choice is key, but not only for consumers, agri-food value chain players should also be able to choose
- Transparency is essential, but it should be provided in a way that brings value and does not stigmatise



## Afternoon session (14 to 16)

### I. Agenda

Welcome by *Anna Gumbau (moderator)*

Opening remarks by *Michaela Bartoňová (Permanent Representation of the Czech Republic to the EU)*

Introduction to event - Interview with *Jaroslava Ovesná (P4F CTP)*

Presentation of EPP report on NGTs by *MEP Michaela Šojdrová*

Remarks by *MEP Marlene Mortler*

Presentation of morning roundtable discussions by *Anna Gumbau*

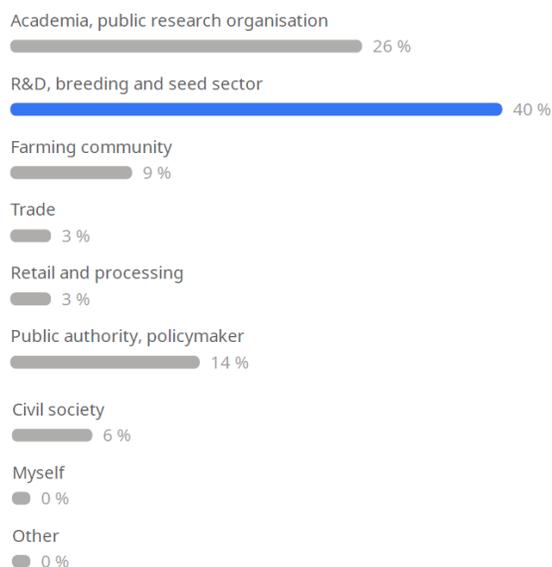
Panel discussion with *Barbara Rudolf (Saat:gut e.V.)*, *Petra Jorasch (Euroseeds)*, *Fabrizio Fabbri (Euro Coop)*, *Lukas Visek (EU Commission)* and *Thor Kofoed (COPA-COGECA)*

Q&A with the audience

Closing remarks by *Amrit Nanda (Plants for the Future ETP)*

### II. Summary of afternoon session

What stakeholder group do you represent? 0 3 5  
(1/2)



A total of 60 participants took part in the afternoon session, covering a wide range of stakeholder groups.

The session was kicked off with Michaela Bartoňová's opening remarks, providing the perspective of the Czech government on the challenges before us, together with the ambitious targets of the EU Green Deal, and calling for a new legislation for NGTs that will enable their use in Europe. This was followed by an interview with Jaroslava Ovesná representing the co-organiser of the event, the Czech national platform Plants for the Future, and providing the perspective of the Czech Republic.



Co-host of the event, MEP Michaela Šojdrová presented her vision for NGTs in Europe and the outline of a study on NGTs that she initiated. The study was financially supported by the EPP group and published in October 2022 (available [here](#)). She particularly mentioned the need to engage consumers and citizens to increase their understanding of NGTs.

Second co-host, MEP Marlene Mortler then provided her remarks, outlining her vision for NGTs in Europe, and the urgency that is needed to put forward alternative legislation for NGT plants and their products.

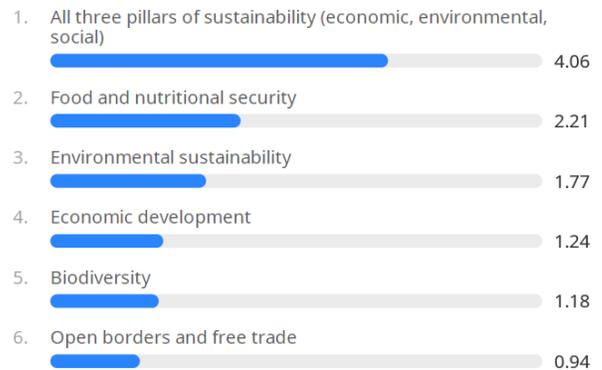


The graphic notes of the morning discussions were briefly presented, followed by some questions to the audience through slido.

**How do you see the role of NGTs in the path to more sustainable agri-food systems?** 0 3 6



**What is more important:** 0 3 4



**What is needed to foster consumer confidence in agrifood systems?** 0 3 6



Following the slido results, the panel was invited to share their views on the potential of NGTs in the transition to more sustainable agri-food systems: Thor Kofoed, representing European farmers (COPA-COGECA), highlighted the need to enable the use of NGTs so that better, more adapted plant varieties will be available for farmers to meet the goals of the EU Green Deal. Petra Jorasch, representing the European seed and breeding sector (Euroseeds), highlighted the need for an enabling legal framework

to support the breeding sector, particularly SMEs, in developing more diverse plant varieties faster and in a more efficient way. Fabrizio Fabbri, representing European consumer cooperatives (Euro Coop), shared his view that NGTs are not necessary to reach the EU Green Deal goals and, if enabling legislation is put forward, will actually have the opposite effect, by further promoting industrial farming and an agri-food system that is currently broken. Barbara Rudolf, representing part of the organic sector (Saat:gut e.V. and Bioland e.V.), shared a similar view to Fabrizio, highlighting that organic



farming should be adopted more widely to reduce the pollution of soils and waterways, and that plant breeding should not include technology that challenges the “integrity of the cell”. Finally, Lukas Visek providing the perspective of the EU commission, highlighted the outcome of the public consultation held this summer as part of the impact assessment for NGTs, with ~80% of respondents stating that the current GMO framework is no longer fit for purpose. He went on to ensure that the potential Commission’s legislative proposal will be based on science and facts collected during the impact assessment.

The topic of reducing EU production in order to become more environmentally sustainable was discussed, with some panellists pointing to a reduction in food waste, which could compensate for lower productions, and others pointing to the central role Europe plays in exporting food to third countries, and the risk that reducing EU production might lead to an increase in imports from countries that might be / become food insecure in the face of climate change.

All speakers and participants were thanked for their time and contribution, and informed that Plant ETP plans to organise more such roundtable table events on this topic in the next year, with the aim to provide an open space for all stakeholders to share their perspectives and views.