



***Agri-food chain views
on the future of
specialty crops and minor uses
in the European Union***



What is at stake?

The lack of plant protection products for minor uses and speciality crops¹ is becoming a crucial factor affecting the sustainable production of these crops in the European Union. This is compromising not only the competitiveness of the entire agri-food chain, including its sustainability and the employment it generates, but also the diversity and safety of our high-quality food in the European Union.

Furthermore, the lack of proper tools, whether they are mechanical, biological or chemicals, will endanger the ability of farmers and relevant operators to prevent, detect and control pests and diseases which will increase as a consequence of climate change and globalised markets. Solutions are needed to ensure proper implementation of integrated pest management from 2014, compliance with high food safety standards, and to avoid distortion of competition with third countries where solutions are already available (e.g. USA-IR4 Project on minor uses and specialty crops).

Since 2009 all interested parties of the agri-food chain² have been working together to solve this problem. Given its importance in terms of value for the EU agricultural production, it is vital for the EU to suggest rapid and concrete solutions to this major concern.

Why are specialty crops and minor uses a problem?

A large number of crops grown in Europe that are of major importance for the agri-food industry and society are relatively minor, both in terms of scale of production and also in their use of crop protection products, when compared to total agricultural production. While the pest problems faced in these crops are a major threat to their production, the required crop protection solutions are often unavailable, as the very high cost of developing new crop protection solutions is not a commercially viable option for the crop protection industry.

While minor uses are often encountered in minor crops, they can also be relevant in more major crops where a pest or disease problem only appears in certain situations, such as the storage of cereals, or can even be important in very specific situations such as plant breeding or seed production. A lot of work has been carried out in EU Member States to find and encourage viable crop protection solutions for these minor crops.

Speciality crops are valued at about €70 billion per year, representing 22% of the total output value of the agricultural sector. The fruit and vegetable sector alone accounts for about €45 billion in the EU-27, with a total production of 70 million tonnes of vegetables and 40 million tonnes of fruit. The market value for ornamental plants is estimated at €27 billion.

Speciality crops are a prerequisite for healthy nutrition. According to many studies, a healthy diet based on fruit and vegetables helps to prevent cancer, cardiovascular diseases, obesity and diabetes. Although the World Health Organisation continues to recommend the consumption of at least 400g of fruit and vegetables per day, this is far from being reached in all EU countries.

¹ Minor uses concern crops grown on relatively small acreage like fruits, herbs, and vegetables, cereals, including rice, seed crops and small crop seed treatments, hops, flowers and all those plants that need a tailor made plant protection product, whether it is for growing them, storage or transportation.

² AREFLH, CELCAA, COCERAL, Copa-Cogeca, ECPA, ESA, Freshfel, IBMA, PROFEL and Union Fleurs.

How to solve this problem?

A study commissioned by the European Commission in 2011 confirms that Regulation 1107/2009 will not solve the majority of issues affecting minor uses and specialty crops. Whilst this Regulation contains some important provisions pertaining to minor uses (e.g. mutual recognition of plant protection products across Member States, extension of use, simplified procedures of authorisations), it does not yet address the core of the problem.

According to Art. 51 of Regulation 1107/2009 on the placing on the market of plant protection products, the European Commission should have presented, by no later than 14th December 2011, a report to the European Parliament and the Council on the establishment of a European fund for minor uses, accompanied, if appropriate, by a legislative proposal. The continuous delays in the publication of this report certainly do not help the discussions to move forward.

The Agri-Food Chain Partners would like to see an **EU permanent programme on minor uses and specialty crops** implemented in the European Union without further delay, with a proper EU investment scheme, where relevant operators, including users of plant protection products, manufacturers, competent authorities and research institutes from all EU Member States could work together to find solutions to common problems, optimise the use of the limited resources available, and avoid further fragmentation of activities. An EU budget of EUR 6 million, with additional co-financing of resources already spent at National level, would help to put an end to this problem once and for all.

The EU and the Member States should also consider research, support and implementation of solutions through the EU Research Fund Horizon 2020, national research funds and the Rural Development Programmes. The establishment of focus and operational groups on minor uses and specialty crops under the European Innovation Partnership on Sustainable and Productive Agriculture will certainly help to identify the needs and address the necessary support through a multi-stakeholder approach.

Moreover, the establishment of this programme may explore opportunities for further cooperation with third countries where activities on minor uses and specialty crops are already ongoing (e.g. IR-4 project, USA).

What is currently done waiting for an EU permanent programme to be put in place?

Since the European Commission took the decision in 2010 to stop financing the activities of the EU working group (North and South) on minor uses and specialty crops, Member States authorities together with EU stakeholders have tried to ensure continuity of meetings, while guaranteeing exchange of information (e.g. data, gaps, priorities, etc). However, the participation of many EU Member States has been compromised due to lack of resources in attending and contributing to these meetings.

If for some crops (e.g. rice) there are no major activities ongoing at MS level, it is clear that progress is often being hampered by highly fragmented activities. Relevant operators, including users of plant protection products (PPPs), PPP manufacturers, competent authorities and research institutes, are active on the ground in different ways, often duplicating activities across Member States. Each of them interacts with one another in different contexts and in different ways:

- **Technical Working Groups (TWGs) in the North and South of Europe** - actively involved in coordination activities, the groups are composed of Member States and industry representatives.
- **Commodity Expert Groups** – coordinated by the Technical Working Groups, they are represented by technical experts from both the public and private sectors working specifically in recently established groups such as fresh vegetables, processed vegetables, ornamentals, tobacco, hops, rice and seeds. They monitor gaps of tools, establish priorities, exchange efficacy data, and put together resources for further studies.
- **National bodies** working individually on specific groups of products and commodities – they do not enter in any coordinating platform at EU level, due to lack of resources to participate/travel, or lack of proper information.

What does an EU programme for minor uses and specialty crops look like?

Work Programme	Objectives	Estimated Costs
European coordination network for minor uses and speciality crops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To manage and co-ordinate the European network on minor uses and speciality crops • To manage the dissemination of information to all partners (including setting up and maintaining relevant databases) • To organise relevant events (e.g. annual workshop) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinating the network • Office costs, travel, etc. • Database development and management • Annual workshop
Coordination of national authorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To organise regular coordination meetings between MS authorities (in two groups – North and South) • To provide financial and logistical support for the working groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Travel and other expenses for meetings – 6 meetings of 20 people
Coordination of national bodies for finding common solutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To provide organisational support for the numerous work groups developing relevant solutions for pest-related problems <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ Working groups could include processed F&V, fresh F&V, berries, seeds, flowers and bulbs, rice • To identify common problems and help coordinate work in finding common solutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Travel and other expenses for meetings – 15 meetings of 15 people
International coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To establish international cooperation to ensure the development of solutions at international level, where possible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual international dialogue meeting
Supporting the development of procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To support the development of relevant European guidance to facilitate minor use authorisations. • To organise on an ‘as-needed’ basis, relevant meetings bringing together experts in the field 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ad-hoc – 10-12 meetings of ~8 people
<i>TOTAL COST (WP-1 – WP-5) = €1 million</i>		
Supporting the funding of projects with a broad interest across EU Member States	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To review priority crop protection needs and identify key areas where solutions are needed • To manage the call for tender of key projects • To provide financial support (20% co-financing) for priority cross-border projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20% financing for projects identified during the call for tender
<i>TOTAL COST (WP-6) = €5 million</i>		