

WRITTEN QUESTION E-0175/03
by Lousewies van der Laan (ELDR)
to the Commission

Subject: EU support for maintaining biological diversity

Technological developments such as selection and genetic modification have led to the development of high-yielding agricultural crops which are becoming increasingly widespread throughout the world. As a result, the diversity of agricultural crops is decreasing as traditional local crops are disappearing. However, this also poses a threat to the genetic data of these 'ancient crops'.

It would, however, be of great benefit to future generations if there continued to be the greatest possible diversity of crops as their genetic data is an important source for creating new crops. In the future, climate change and changing economic, social and environmental circumstances will continue to require new crops with new characteristics. It is thus of literally vital importance that old crops should survive.

An organisation such as De Oerakker (Foundation for biodiversity in agriculture) in the north of the Netherlands collects seeds from as many different crops as possible. Some species can be kept in deep-freeze cells at the Agricultural University of Wageningen, whereas others have to be sown and harvested each year. The foundation has managed this very successfully so far but it can no longer continue to do so on financial and human resources grounds (it is staffed by volunteers).

1. Does the Commission share my view that maintaining the genetic data of old crops is extremely important for future generations?
2. Does it agree that this matter is of such great importance to society that it is essential to have an approach that will guarantee continuity?
3. What possibilities are there at European level to support projects of this kind, be it in financial or organisational terms, through exchanges with similar projects elsewhere in Europe, or otherwise?