

WRITTEN QUESTION E-3686/09
by Roberta Angelilli (UEN)
to the Commission

Subject: Register of varieties of vegetable species

The Italian Ministry for Agriculture and Forestry has established a register of varieties of vegetable species, in which local varieties may be entered under the heading 'conservation varieties'. Conservation varieties means varieties, populations, ecotypes, clones and cultivars of agricultural interest relating to plant species. In order to be included in the register, they must meet certain criteria: (1) They must be autochthonous or non-autochthonous and must never have been included in the national register of varieties of agrarian and vegetable species and must also have been integrated into local agrisystems for at least 50 years; (2) They must no longer be included in the register, but be threatened by genetic erosion; (3) They must be cultivated within national territory and kept in botanical gardens, research institutes, public or private germoplasm banks or research centres. Producers of varieties included in the register are allowed to sell them directly, subject to clear restrictions on area and quantity. Firstly, they must be sold 'locally', in other words in the traditional area of cultivation or the province in which they are produced. Secondly, the sales must be of 'modest quantities', which means that individual farmers may dispose annually of a quantity sufficient to establish a cultivation of 1000 square meters of vegetables. These two restrictions are a serious constraint on economic viability for producers, be they farmers or nurserymen, since there is no real scope for marketing the products and hence trading in and disseminating the seeds or seedlings obtained from them.

Furthermore, the varieties included in the Community register of vegetable varieties may be marketed throughout the European Union. The inclusion of conservation varieties under a special section of the register, as provided for under the rules, completely rules out this option. Because of the rules as they stand, local varieties are destined to die out within a few years in favour of hybrid species produced by seed multinationals, whose monopoly position will be further enhanced.

1. Is the Commission aware of the situation described above?
2. Will the Commission provide a general overview of the situation?