Future of Europe's horticulture sector - strategies for growth

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The European Parliament adopted by 354 votes to 285 with 21 abstentions, a resolution on the future of Europe's horticulture sector – strategies for growth.

The horticulture industry comprises fruit, vegetables, potatoes, salads, herbs and ornamentals, and whereas the horticulture sector incorporates nurseries, perennial nurseries, gardening services, cemetery gardening, gardening supplies retailers, garden centres, florists and landscape gardening. The fruit and vegetables (F&V) sector receives about 3% of Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) aid yet accounts for 18% of the total value of agricultural production in the EU. It represents 3% of the EU's usable agricultural area and is worth more than EUR 50 billion.

Promoting the horticultural sector: Parliament stressed the importance of promoting the EU horticulture sector and enabling it to compete better in the global marketplace and continuing efforts to eliminate the imbalance between operators and suppliers. It emphasised the need to make it **easier for producers to gain access to third-country markets** and called on the Commission to increase its efforts to support exporters of fruit, vegetables, flowers and ornamental plants to overcome the increasing number of non-tariff barriers, such as some third-country phytosanitary standards that make export from the EU difficult, if not impossible.

The Commission was called on to establish the **same market access conditions for all market participants in the EU**, as regards marketing standards, designations of origin, etc. and to carry out checks to ensure that those conditions are observed, in order to prevent distortions of competition.

Promoting producer organisations (POs): membership of producer organisations (POs) should also be increased by making the system more attractive, in view of the fact that more than half of all EU growers still do not belong to a PO despite the Commission's objective of an average rate of 60 % PO membership by 2013. Given that POs play a key role in enhancing the negotiating power of F&V organisations, Parliament judged it essential to **clarify European legislation on the recognition of POs to prevent uncertainty among producers**.

Members stressed that a Union instrument established for managing serious crises affecting a number of Member States should be open to all producers, irrespective of whether or not they are members of a PO.

Plant protection products (PPPs): underlining that horticulture is reliant on a variety of PPPs, the resolution called on the Commission to take **a risk-based approach** to the regulation of these products. Minor uses are particularly vulnerable owing to the scarcity of the relevant active substances. The Commission was urged to review the operation of the arrangements for **mutual recognition** of PPP authorisations.

Members took the view that the **private standards** for pesticide residues that have been adopted by many large retail chains are anti-competitive and detrimental to the interests of F&V growers. The Commission was asked to put an end to such practices, given that the pesticide residue levels laid down in EU legislation provide adequate protection for the health of both consumers and producers.
Integrated pest management (IPM): Parliament called on the Commission and the Member States: i) to promote integrated pest management (IPM), support innovation and entrepreneurship through increased research into and development of non-chemical alternatives, such as natural predators and parasites of pest

species, and ii) to use the Horizon 2020 Framework Programme for Research and Innovation to fund applied research that supports the development of integrated strategies for pest, disease and weed control.
The Commission is, inter alia, called on:

- to safeguard the freedom of plant breeders to use existing plant materials freely to develop and market new ones, regardless of any patent claims extending to plant materials;
- to support the development of **local fruit and vegetable markets** and of short supply chains, thereby ensuring product freshness;
- differentiate between cisgenic and transgenic plants and to create a different approvals process for cisgenic plants so as to recognise that cisgenesis is an accelerated form of conventional plant breeding;
- include **'protected cultivation'** in Horizon 2020 calls in order to stimulate innovation regarding, for example, sustainable crop protection, sustainable water and nutrient usage, energy efficiency, advanced cultivation and production systems, and sustainable transport;
- facilitate access to long-term funding for investment in modern horticultural production technologies.

As regards **waste**, Members are deeply concerned that between a third and a half of edible produce is wasted because of its appearance. They called on the Commission to create, as a matter of urgency, possibilities for marketing a wider range of quality specifications of produce. They drew attention to trials conducted in Austria and Switzerland involving the **sale of blemished fruit and vegetables** and called on supermarkets to take into account market research which shows that many consumers are not necessarily worried about the cosmetic appearance of fruit and vegetables and are happy to purchase lower grade produce, particularly if this may appear to be cheaper.

Lastly, the Commission and the Member States were asked to make the legislative and political environment as supportive as possible for uses of horticultural waste.