

PRESS RELEASE

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Plants for the Future celebrates plant breeding as the heart of our agri-food systems and highlights the importance of public-private collaborations to ensure translation from fundamental research to new plant varieties.

On 11th September 2024, Plants for the Future ETP (Plant ETP) organised an outreach event highlighting the essential role plant breeding plays in our agri-food systems. The event was kindly hosted by the Flanders Research Institute for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (ILVO), and supported by Plant ETP's founding members COPA-COGECA, the European Plant Science Organisation (EPSO) and Euroseeds. This event was organised in the context of the Fascination of Plants Day (<https://plantday18may.org/>), a bi-annual initiative by EPSO to encourage outreach and science communication activities around plant-related topics and research, towards the general public.

The event welcomed over 50 participants, made up of a wide range of agri-food and research stakeholders, as well as EU and national policymakers. The presentations included an introduction to the essential role plant breeding plays in our agri-food systems, the path of developing new plant varieties, from fundamental research on biological processes, to commercial breeding and crop production, as well as some case examples of public-private partnerships. The diversity of the speakers, including from the research, breeding and farming communities, provided a unique insight into the challenges and opportunities related to different aspects of research in plant breeding.

The presentations were followed by a lively panel discussion and field visits on the ILVO campus. The field visits included the HYDRAS-facility, a state-of-the-art, multi-sensor and drought controlled field phenotyping platform that enables the study of plants' responses to drought; chickpea, as an example of a new protein crop being adapted to the local needs; chicory, as an example on how new breeding techniques are used to unravel the genetic pathway for specific metabolites; and a practical example of a traditional forage grass breeding program.

The event underscored the critical need for more dedicated funding for research generally, and particularly for plant breeding. The mention of plant breeding innovation as a key enabler for the transition towards more sustainable agri-food systems, in the report on the strategic dialogue for the future of agriculture, was welcomed.

“Plant breeding is offering a great number of benefits to society. It is ‘the’ solution for many of our challenges: climate change, reduction of inputs, biodiversity, and here at ILVO we work to develop research outcomes that can directly contribute to that solution.” said Kristiaan Van Laecke, the Head of the Plant Sciences Unit at ILVO.

“This event was a great opportunity to raise awareness of the importance of plant breeding in our agri-food systems. The focus on public-private partnerships emphasised the need for better translation of research outcomes into benefits for stakeholders, consumers and society. We are calling on the EU Commission to include a dedicated public-private partnership on plant breeding for FP10, so that plant breeding can be fully leveraged to support the transition towards more sustainable and circular agri-food systems.” said Amrit Nanda, the Executive Manager of Plant ETP.

For more information about the event and presentations, see [here](#).

Plants for the Future ETP (Plant ETP) is a multi-stakeholder European Technology Platform representing the plant sector, from the seed and breeding sector, the farming community and academia. Plant ETP brings stakeholders from the plant sector together to consider the challenges and opportunities of agricultural value chains in a holistic way, while developing a vision for future systems spanning food, feed, and biobased raw materials. In this way, Plant ETP provides strategic direction, recommendations of essential research and innovation, and science-based advice for the benefit of policymakers, research funding providers, practitioners, and innovators throughout agricultural value chains.