Council of the
European Union

Brussels, 7 June 2017
(OR. en)

10055/17

AGRI 314
AGRIFIN 57
AGRIORG 54

NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	The upcoming European Soya Declaration - Information from the German and Hungarian delegations

Delegations will find in the Annexes information from the German and Hungarian delegations on the above subject to be presented under "Any other business" at the Council ("Agriculture and Fisheries") on 12 June 2017.

The upcoming European Soya Declaration

Information from the German and Hungarian delegations

Germany and Hungary would like to draw the attention of the Council to the upcoming signature of the European Soya Declaration.

Soya plays and will play a key role in European agriculture and food industry. As all legumes, their sustainable production provides for environmental benefits such as improvement of soil fertility and reduced use of fertilizer as they extend the range of varieties in crop rotations. This has also positive impacts on biodiversity in agricultural landscapes and contributes to climate change mitigation.

Between 2013 and 2015, the EU has imported on average 36.1 million tonnes of soybean equivalent on a yearly basis. On average, 12.7 million tonnes of soybeans are imported into the EU for crushing into soybean oil and meal; and 18.5 million tonnes of soymeal (i.e. 23.4 million tonnes of soybean equivalent) are directly imported into the EU yearly. By contrast, in the same period between 0.43 and 0.56 million hectares of soybean crops have been cultivated in the EU, producing between 0.96 and 1.85 million tonnes of soybeans yearly[1]. These figures show a high rate of dependency on imports making the European agriculture vulnerable to external conditions. Moreover in some countries of origin soya is produced on primary forest land which contributes to global loss of forests and associated ecosystem services. The vast majority of imported soya is produced with genetically modified seeds.

Thus, a considerable part of value creation for Europe's protein supply takes place outside of Europe, while at the same time our great domestic potential for soya cultivation is not yet fully tapped. To that end efforts are needed that support more diverse cropping systems, promote innovation or support the development of logistics, processing and markets for sustainably produced legumes including soya.

[1] Commission staff working document: Genetically modified commodities in the EU, Brussels, 2016

The future signatories of the European Soya Declaration (Annex) support increased production of legume crops for food and feed as a contribution to the development of more sustainable and resilient agricultural systems in Europe, thus supporting the United Nations Agenda 2030 and the European Union's Sustainable Development Strategy.

The solemn signature of the European Soya Declaration is planned to take place on the margins of the July Agriculture and Fisheries Council. At this stage Germany and Hungary are expected to be among the signatories, yet this possibility is open to all European countries. Other Member States sharing the objectives of this initiative are kindly invited to consider joining and signing this Declaration.

Common Declaration of Germany, Hungary …:

European Soya Declaration

Preamble

The undersigned support increased production of legume crops for food and feed as a contribution to the development of more sustainable and resilient agricultural systems in Europe. This supports the United Nations Agenda 2030 and the European Union's Sustainable Development Strategy.

Agenda 2030, with 17 sustainable development goals (SDG), was adopted by all Member States of the United Nations Organisation at a summit in September 2015. The measures covered by this declaration contribute particularly to Goals 2 and 15. Goal 2 focuses on ending hunger, increasing food security, improving nutrition and promoting sustainable agriculture. Goal 15 aims to protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and stop and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss. This declaration is a commitment to the sustainable development of efficient, resilient and productive agricultural and food systems directly supporting Goal 2 and supporting Goal 15 through associated measures to protect agricultural resources and natural and semi-natural ecosystems.

The EU Sustainability Strategy was adopted in 2001 to sustainably increase prosperity and to improve the quality of life now and for future generations, and to tap the environmental and social innovation potential of the economy. The strategy aims to prevent the over-exploitation of resources, gain more recognition of the value of ecosystem services, and stop the decline in biodiversity. The greater use of the ecosystem services that legumes can provide in Europe makes an important contribution to achieving these objectives.

Drivers and objectives

Legume crops are vital to the global agricultural system but only 3-4% of the arable land area in Europe is used for legume crops. Because of the special characteristics of legumes, increasing European legume production contributes to the diversification of cropping with benefits for other crops, particularly cereals. Legume crops are 'break' crops that reduce weed, pest and disease risks in cropping systems. This reduces the need for pesticides. They also 'fix' atmospheric nitrogen reducing fertilizer nitrogen use. A wide range of legume species adapted to different farming circumstances is available to expand legume production all over Europe.

Soybean is the most widely cultivated legume in the world. Originating from China, where it has been grown for thousands of years, the soybean was introduced to Europe nearly 150 years ago. Although still widely thought of as new to Europe, it is also the most widely grown grain legume in Europe where it grows well. Yields in Europe are high and similar to those in USA and Brazil which are the main exporters of soybeans and soybean meal.

The signatories to this declaration maintain that the following elements relating to the sustainable production of soybeans and other legumes support Goals 2 and 15 of the Agenda 2030 of the United Nations:

- development of sustainable soybean production in suitable areas of Europe;
- integration of soybean cropping into diverse well-planned crop rotations;
- use of integrated crop protection that follows the 'as much as is necessary and as little as possible' principle with priority given to the use of host-plant resistance and tolerant cultivars;
- maintenance of traditional valued landscapes, landscape features and protection of high nature value biotopes in agricultural landscapes; and
- development of sustainable soybean and other legume markets in Europe that balance and meet the needs of growers, processors, livestock producers and consumers along transparent value chains.

Soybean production can be beneficially increased in many countries in western Europe. Even greater opportunities exist in central and eastern Europe. Large areas of these regions are cultivated with wheat, maize, oilseed rape and sunflower in simple cropping systems that lack diversity. Including legumes in these cropping systems strengthens local economies, increases local and regional protein self-sufficiency, and supports East-West protein partnerships. Protein crop production in Europe generally supports rural economies and creates jobs in farming, processing and usage of locally produced proteins for food and feed.

In view of the need for sustainable agricultural production systems that support Agenda 2030 and the EU Sustainability Strategy of 2001, the signatories support local, regional, national and European initiatives to develop sustainable protein supplies that are highly accepted in consumer markets. Efforts include agricultural policy measures that support more diverse cropping systems, promote innovation, or support the development of logistics, processing and markets. In addition, measures adopted by the signatories will:

- provide consumers with information on moving to more healthy sustainable diets using plant protein;
- encourage more precise livestock feeding to increase the efficiency of protein use in feeding;
- improve the use of protein from grassland;
- support more effective use of other European protein sources such as rapeseed and sunflower meal, and by-products such as distillers grains;
- increase locally-adapted legume production using sustainable production techniques and locally adapted legumes; and
- strengthen support for certification of sustainably-produced soybeans and meal imported from other parts of the world to meet remaining demand.

Because of increasing consumer interest in GMO-free products, especially those of animal origin, the signatories are committed to increasing choice for consumers with respect to GMO-free food and feed. They therefore support the further development of markets for sustainably cultivated non-GMO soybeans and soybean products as well as the establishment of transparent product labeling systems based on certified production standards such as Danube Soya and Europe Soya. The signatories also support the development of East-West partnerships, including between EU and non-EU countries such as Ukraine, Moldova, Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, so that more sustainable, certified soybeans are cultivated, processed and traded in Europe.