

The EU's proposed plant legislation THREATENS PLANT CONSERVATION

Plant Heritage adds its voice to the widespread condemnation of the EU's proposed plant reproductive material legislation, Mercy Morris explains the issues

The EU's draft proposals for regulating plant reproductive material calls for all plant varieties to be listed on an official register. It would also make it illegal to sell unregistered varieties. Commercial horticulture, such as seed companies, plant growers and many other interested parties represented by the Horticultural Trades Association (HTA), as well as other gardening organisations have voiced their concerns which we share.

In addition, we have a particular concern. It is stated in the proposals that the regulations do not apply to 'material intended to be or maintained in gene bank organisations and networks of *ex-situ* and *in-situ* or on-farm conservation of genetic resources'. However it appears that 'professional operators', defined as 'any natural or legal person carrying out as a profession at least one of the following activities with regard to the plant reproductive material a) producing, b) breeding, c) maintaining, d) providing services, e) preserving, including storing, f) making available on the market are all subject to the legislation.

It seems that an assumption has been made that the only bodies that carry out conservation work are organisations such as botanic gardens or networks developed purely for that purpose.

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■ Mercy Morris *Plant Heritage* Plant Conservation Officer

An organisation such as *Plant Heritage* (and our European counterparts in France, the Netherlands and Germany) that encompasses many commercial operators of all sizes has not been considered. However it is unlikely that the conservation of cultivars would be possible on such a scale if it were not for some form of commercial involvement; after all in many cases that is why the plants were created in the first place.

We are therefore very concerned that the changes will affect the profitability of horticulture and, in addition, not protect those in the industry who are conserving plants; thus meaning that conservation of plants becomes the preserve of only botanic gardens and individuals with no commercial involvement.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

You can lobby your MEP, particularly those that sit on the AGRI committee, for details see www.europarl.org.uk/en/your_MEPs.html