CriticalAgTech

Manifesto for the European Union to establish a Strategy for Critical Ag Technologies

Background

In recent years, several factors have converged to trigger recognition of agriculture and agricultural production as critical elements of the European Union's strategy autonomy, resilience, competitiveness, and crisis preparedness. Conflicts in Ukraine and the Strait of Hormuz combined with trade disruptions have highlighted critical dependencies for animal feed and key fertilisers, among others.

Food security is also a core dimension of Europe's defence and preparedness agenda: as food has increasingly been weaponised through conflict, coercion, and trade disruption, achieving strategic autonomy in agriculture and food production is essential to Europe's security.

The shrinking toolbox, including plant protection and reproductive material, digital tools, as well as climate volatility have highlighted the need to better equip farmers. Overall, the competitiveness and climate resilience capacity of EU farmers have suffered as their competitors in third countries consistently access new ag technologies years before they are authorized in Europe. Without embracing innovation and removing the current regulatory barriers in the EU that result in many cutting-edge tools being stuck in the pipeline, this gap will widen, putting EU farmers at a competitive disadvantage and the EU's food security at risk.

Our call

Just as certain technologies and their raw materials have been designated as critical/strategic for the digital economy and the energy transition, we call on European policymakers to establish the concept of Critical Ag Technologies. Europe needs a specific strategy to produce what ag technologies it can, import what it must from diversified sources, and capture and revalorise biomaterials for agrifood use wherever possible. Furthermore, Europe needs to adapt its regulatory approach to embrace the potential and benefits of innovation, while safeguarding the safety of consumers and the environment.

Rationale

At the moment, policies related to ensuring the competitiveness, climate resilience and supply chain security of food and agriculture are fragmented across different policy siloes: biomanufacturing and fertiliser supply fall under the remit of DG GROW, while many product regulations are the domain of DG SANTE, which historically has a mandate to ensure food safety, but is not accountable for ensuring that farmers are adequately equipped to meet the imperatives of strategic autonomy, resilience, and competitiveness. DG AGRI has often been relegated to looking after farmer uptake of technologies once they are available, while DG ENVI considers the potential environmental impacts of new technologies, with less attention to the costs of non-adoption.

The result is that EU farmers are not equipped to meet today's challenges, let alone tomorrow's. It would be unthinkable to send soldiers to the frontline without arming them for the conflicts they will face, yet that is exactly the position that Europe's farmers find themselves today.

Articulating an EU Strategy for Critical Ag Technologies would provide a much-needed framework to promote joined-up thinking to ensure that the EU's farmers are empowered to make their full contribution to Europe's strategy autonomy, resilience, competitiveness, and crisis preparedness.

Signatories

biocontrol coalition – Together for EU ag innovation
ecofi – European Consortium of the Organic-Based Fertilizer Industry
agrar – agrar-industrie.ch
Consumer Choice Center
EBIC – European Biostimulants Industry Council
ASAJA
Euroseeds – Embracing Nature
Agrární komora České republiky
ELO – European Landowners' Organization
Žemės ūkio rūmai – Jūsų sėkmės raktas!
IBMA – International Biocontrol Manufacturers Association
European Biosolutions Coalition
Alliance for Biosolutions
CropLife Europe
Bayer
Farm Tech Society
BioFirst
FEFAC – Experts in Animal Nutrition
Koppert
Georgian Farmers' Association