



European Plant Science Organisation
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Article

International cooperation

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Europe has an enormous potential and responsibility to be one of the leading science forces globally – There is an urgent need to enable European scientists to join and lead longer term global partnerships

[Scientists from various disciplines](#) are taking actions to ensure Europe will still take this role in the future – with the same strong commitment from policy we will achieve this ambitious goal of long term global partnerships in science and, I would say, innovation as well!

European plant scientists feel very strongly about their essential, yet partly underutilised, contributions to food security, including the supply of sufficient, nutritious and affordable food, as well as having important inputs into public health issues, climate change mitigation, development of sustainable agricultural systems and energy security; all of which are global challenges that call for global actions. For these reasons the Global Plant Council ([GPC](#)) was formed by 13 plant science societies, including the European Plant Science Organization ([EPSO](#)), three years ago. The GPC has subsequently developed nine focus areas that require global efforts, such as: the creation of a digital seed bank to provide a basis for making informed decisions on germplasm preservation and breeding strategies; better utilization of local germplasm for crop improvement; development of new crops that are more nutritious; improved understanding of the plant-environment metagenome for crop adaptation; and how best to share information and resources.

In addition, EPSO is engaging in collaborations with the Food and Agricultural Organization of the UN ([FAO](#)) to jointly develop long term partnerships by linking a range of stakeholders in the plant sciences with the aim of exploring avenues for sustainable intensification of agricultural production in developing countries. The first workshop will be held this June in Rome with over 70 participants from developing countries and Europe to discuss immediate actions through dialogue involving science and policy/economic experts.

EPSO members are active in the European Commission's and in Member States' partnering initiatives in the 7th Framework Programme with [Latin America](#) and with [India](#), as well as in discussions with the Strategic Forum on International Cooperation ([SFIC](#)). These are all good starting points for establishing a much greater role globally.

The most recent proof of the power of grass-root engagement of scientists is the '[Fascination of Plants Day](#)' – an apparently crazy idea put forward by some EPSO members in 2009, but now the first International Fascination of Plants Day actually took place on 18 May 2012 in over 39 countries across the globe, with over 580 institutions organizing events on the day. This currently relies on the resources and goodwill of EPSO and the institutes and there is no European support as yet.

European scientists urgently need a clear path providing the resources that will facilitate their timely and critical engagement in a number of major global efforts, such as the goal of achieving global food security, where their involvement is, in many respects, crucial if this objective is to succeed. Some countries, like Germany, have already started a harmonisation/consolidation process to streamline international agricultural research for development. Let's make the Horizon 2020, the European Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, together with the Strategic Forum for International Cooperation a strong tool for European scientists to engage and lead global efforts! We need to include within the Societal Challenge programme a highway for major, and arguably essential, global research efforts to be supported with the required critical mass and resources in a timely and focussed manner – let's move from notes to music!

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About EPSO

EPSO, the European Plant Science Organisation, is an independent academic organisation that represents more than 260 research institutes, departments and universities from 30 countries in Europe and beyond. EPSO's mission is to improve the impact and visibility of plant science in Europe. www.epsoweb.org