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Securing organic animal and plant breeding through a common cross-sector financing strategy

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Abstract

Organic breeding is the basis for a self-determined, independent organic sector. Despite the benefits provided to the organic sector, the number of dedicated breeding initiatives in Europe is very limited. Currently, the financing of organic breeding is insufficient and fragmented. Therefore, there is a need to place financing of organic breeding on a solid and sustainable basis with shared responsibilities along the value chain. We propose for discussion with the organic livestock sector, a financing concept of joint pre-commercial investment of the organic value chain (0.1 -0.2% organic market turnover at point of sale) into organic animal and plant breeding.

Introduction

Conventional and organic livestock systems differ in terms of breeding goals and reproduction techniques. In organic breeding, health, fertility and longevity of the animals have highest priority, together with product quality. Organic breeding is aimed at producing robust animals that remain healthy and efficient producers under free-range conditions and farm-based feed. Additionally, in some instances, conventional breeding strategies rely on techniques that diverge from the principles of organic farming. From this arises the need for tailored breeding responding to organic sector needs. Organic breeding provides gains to the organic sector by ensuring the integrity of organic products and by strengthening consumers' trust. However, the business case of organic breeding is still challenging and organic breeding initiatives are chronically underfunded. As organic breeding has an overall positive impact on the sector, we propose the development of a cross-sector financing strategy based on a value-chain partnership.

Results - A cross-sector pool funding strategy for boosting organic breeding

The existing organic breeding initiatives are characterised by chronic underfunding. The diversification and dispersion of the sector makes it difficult to achieve massive demand, hence making it quite difficult to develop many profitable business cases. In addition, the possibility of using conventional breeding stock affects this development. Therefore, an improvement in the financial basis is urgently needed. An initial cross-sector pool funding concept was developed (Figure 1) during a multi-step stakeholder dialogue activated within the organic seed and breeding sector with the objective to boost value chain collaborations. It is proposed as a starting point for discussing a common financing concept for organic plant and animal breeding.

From this dialogue emerged the need to propose an integrated concept for animal and plant breeding (Figure 1). Licences at farm level or at different product level of the value chain lead to distortions of competition or disproportionate price increases. Therefore, a flat rate of 1 to 2

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per mille of total organic market turnover at the point of sale is proposed for promoting the participation of the entire organic industry. Clear criteria and methods for the transparent allocation of funds must be developed together with independent monitoring protocols of the breeding programs financed. Increasing these investments will leverage the whole sector, providing efficient gains to all organic value chain actors. Awareness raising and communication of the importance of breeding for ensuring the independence of the organic sector and the integrity of organic products are an integral part of the concept.

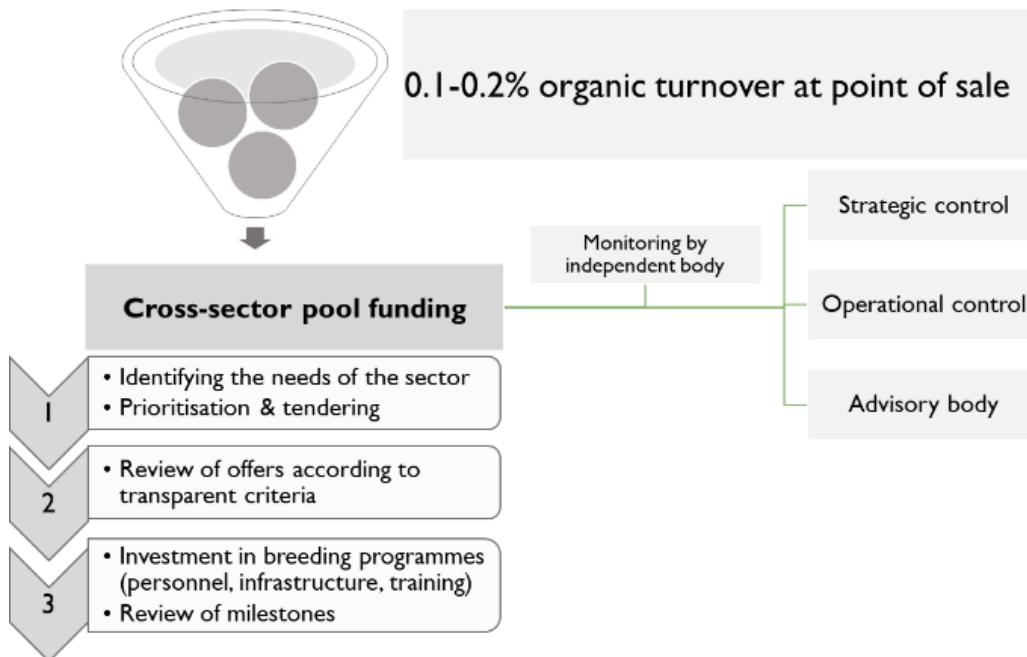


Figure 1. Schematic representation of cross-sector pool funding strategy

Discussion

- *ENGAGEMENT.BIOBREEDING EUROPE initiative*

It is evident that the need to increase organic breeding exists equally in animal and plant production at European level. Therefore, integrating organic animal and plant breeding right from the start in the pool funding strategy would prevent a competition between the concepts and the actors of the organic breeding initiatives. However, the needs are very different between the plant and animal sector. A dedicated dialogue within the organic livestock sector is necessary for developing adequate framework conditions and priority selection procedures suitable for the organic animal breeding context.

Network and collaboration - your suggestions for research and support policies to develop further organic animal husbandry

To increase the availability of organic cultivars and animal breeds in order to achieve the vision in the new Organic Regulation 2018/848, a strong independent organic breeding sector is needed. The whole sector should be engaged in obtaining this objective by direct contribution and by advocating for additional public funds and resources.