



# PRESS RELEASE

## EU launches official campaign on biodiversity

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ESA is the voice of the European seed industry, representing those active in research, breeding, production and marketing of seeds of agricultural and ornamental plant species. It represents 37 national seed associations (and with that more than 1000 seed businesses in the EU, most of them SMEs) and 55 direct company members.

ESA's mission is to work for fair and proportionate regulation of the European seed industry, freedom of choice for customers in supplying seeds as a result of innovative, diverse technologies and production methods and for effective protection of intellectual property rights relating to plants and seed.

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Global biodiversity – the rich variety of life on this planet – is under severe threat, with species being lost at 100 to 1000 times the normal rate. More than one third of all species are considered threatened with extinction and an estimated 60% of the Earth's ecosystem services have degraded in the last 50 years. Mostly, human activities are causing this loss, through land-use change, over-exploitation, unsustainable practices, pollution, introduction of invasive species etc. This often leads to habitat -and later on species- destruction, fragmentation and degradation. Climate change is also an increasingly important factor.

Despite numerous efforts around the globe, studies show that biodiversity still is diminishing at startling rates. With street events in cities including Amsterdam, Warsaw, and Madrid, the EU is now launching a Europe-wide campaign aimed at raising citizen's awareness of this issue. The main thrust of the campaign will be to show citizens the real implications biodiversity loss will have in their daily lives, with a focus on actions citizens can take to help protect Europe's natural capital. This innovative campaign, which coincides with the UN's designation of 2010 as the Year of Biodiversity, will be disseminated through a dedicated website, a viral clip, PR actions, street art and slots in print media and social media.

Almost in parallel, European leaders approved the Union's new biodiversity targets on 26 March, and agreed to halt the loss of biodiversity and the degradation of ecosystems services and restore them as far as possible by 2020. In fact, this agreement followed the acceptance that the EU's original target date of 2010 could not be achieved. Leaders also set out a long term vision for 2050, by which time biodiversity should be protected, valued and appropriately restored, and called for biodiversity objectives to be integrated more clearly in a variety of EU policies and strategies.

"Plant breeding is based on access to and use of biodiversity. This is how plant breeders have managed to continuously create *new* biodiversity in the area of agricultural, vegetable and ornamental species. ESA therefore clearly supports the EU in raising awareness on this important subject", Garlich von Essen, Secretary General of the European Seed Association welcomed the EU's approach.