Dear Member of the European Parliament,

We write to you on behalf of the European farmers' organisations listed below and the Public Research and Regulation Initiative (PRRI). The farmers' organisations below support the freedom of farmers to choose the crop varieties, including approved genetically modified (GM) varieties, they find best suited to address the increasing and changing challenges in farming. PRRI is a world-wide organisation of public sector scientists active in modern biotechnology for the common good. Our organisations are part of a European network of farmers and scientists (Farmers Scientists Network - FSN).

We warmly congratulate you on your election into the European Parliament. You now have the honour and responsibility of being a member of the European Parliament at a crucial time for EU agriculture. The United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), estimates that by 2050 **the world will have to produce 70% more food** to meet the demand of a growing population. To achieve this, agricultural production of food, feed, fibre and biomass will have to increase substantially. This challenge will be made even greater in years to come due to greater pressure on resources and the reduction of available agricultural land. A key factor is **climate change**, which is predicted to reduce the availability of crucial inputs of production such as water and land and change the multiplication rates and geographic distribution of pathogens and pests.

European farmers must be in a position to respond to the global challenges of food and energy security. It is essential that they can increase their production capacity[1] while reducing their environmental impacts – in short there is an urgent need for "**sustainable intensification**". This process must go hand in hand with the improved economic viability and resilience of farmers, to allow for investment. Without a fair return for European farmers' investments and work, environmental sustainability will become even more challenging.

A broad spectrum of crop production systems, technologies and practices has the potential to contribute to sustainable intensification and to increase farmers' competitiveness. **Farming systems that combine different technologies and practices tailored to specific needs will produce real progress**. Among available technologies, crop breeding deserves special attention. If the EU wants to respond to the global challenges in agriculture, then EU farmers will need to have access to crop varieties that are less dependent on pesticides, that produce more per hectare, that require less mechanical soil cultivation, that can withstand the effects of climate change, and that can produce food that is safer and of higher quality. As through the history of modern agriculture, farmers must be able to harness the power of genetic improvement.

Developing such crop varieties cannot be done by conventional breeding alone. Genetic modification (GM) can help overcome the limits of conventional breeding. It can produce results faster than conventional breeding, is more precise than traditional plant breeding approaches, and can be used to move genes that cannot be moved by conventional genetic crossing. Alongside other tools and techniques, **Genetic modification can help considerably in achieving sustainable intensification of farming, and in some cases it is the only solution available.**

Over the past 30 years Member States and the European Commission have, and are continuing to, invest substantially in research that aims to assess the safety of genetic modifications. Nowadays, as concluded by

[1] Over the years, the EU has changed from being a major food exporter to becoming the world's biggest importer of agricultural commodities. The EU outsources arable land amounting to an area nearly the size of Germany in other parts of the world to produce for its internal needs. In doing so the EU continues to push prices up on the global food and feed market, with dire consequences for people in developing countries who often spend half of their income on food.

the EU's research efforts[2], there are **no further doubts that the techniques of genetic engineering carry no inherent risks**. These scientific findings are confirmed by the experience with GM crops to date. Global GM crop cultivation has increased from 1.7 million hectares in 1996 to 175.2 million hectares in 2013. For this period **there is not a single verifiable report of the adverse effects of crop genetic modification on human and animal health or the environment.** In addition, a range of peer-reviewed studies have reported that using GM crops leads to significant socio-economic and environmental benefits including yield gains, reductions in pesticide use, lower mycotoxin contamination, nutritional enhancement and substantial decreases in the use of fossil fuels.

Despite the mounting scientific evidence on safety and the fact that GM crops have proved to be at least as safe as their conventional counterparts over 18 years, the European Union has, in reaction to public concern, adopted **counterproductive policies on plant improvement based on genetic modification**. These policies have been based on **short term political motives,** rather than on **scientific evidence and a long term, holistic vision**. The overall result is that genetic engineering has been prevented from **fulfilling its potential as a key enabling technology for sustainable intensification in the EU.**

European agriculture and public research have been especially damaged by these policies. Unlike competitors outside the EU, the vast majority of **European farmers do not have access to GM crop varieties** that could help to increase productivity while having less impact on the environment[3].This amounts to significant loss of income and competitiveness for farmers and significant missed opportunities to, for example, reduce the use of pesticides.

Much of the current European public research in modern agricultural biotechnology aims to strengthen the economic, social and/or environmental sustainability of food, feed and biomass production. Many of these public research projects would offer significant health benefits for consumers and wider environmental benefits. Examples include Camelina plants that have been genetically modified to produce omega-3 oils or gluten free wheat varieties obtained through genetically modification. However, there is a continued brain drain of public sector scientists and a slowing down of public research in this area. As a result, **an important root of innovation essential for the future of sustainable farming and self-sufficiency in the EU is constantly being cut back** and is actually dying off.

We believe that a **radical shift** towards a different growth path is needed in order to establish competitive and sustainable EU agricultural production. The current global challenges in agriculture urgently require that decision makers restore the **centrality and value of innovation and sound science** as the basis for decision making in all **policies and regulations dealing with farming,** including the ones related to the use of GM crops.

Therefore we ask for your concrete commitment to the following areas:

DECISION MAKING

- Take **decisions** on the basis of **robust, sound, peer-reviewed scientific evidence** and continue to demand this of the Commission and the Council. **Failing to support the EU's own best science** in

[2] European Commission. DG Research. (2001). EC-Sponsored research on safety the genetically modified organisms (1985-2000) http://ec.europa.eu/research/quality-of-life/gmo/ and European Commission. DG Research (2010). A decade of EU-funded GMO research (2001 - 2010). http://ec.europa.eu/research/biosociety/pdf/a_decade_of_eu-funded_gmo_research.pdf

[3] The possibility for farmers to cultivate GM varieties is currently very limited in the EU: only one crop is approved to be grown in the EU and its cultivation is prohibited in several Member States through legally questionable bans. Detailed information on these bans are available on the website of the FSN http://greenbiotech.eu/

the long term will **slow down** economic **growth**, prevent **innovation**, discourage **investments,** undermine **consumer confidence, limit the options for sustainable agriculture and hold back EU competitiveness**.

GOVERNANCE OF SCIENCE

- Respect the **independence and merit of** the EU scientific institutions such as the European Food Safety Agency, the Joint Research Centre and the Chief Scientific Adviser to the President of the European Commission.
- Refrain from **delegitimizing** the EU scientific institutions if you do not agree with their opinions.
- Avoid legitimizing **dubious research** characterised by fundamentally flawed methodology, misinterpretation of data and unsubstantiated conclusions.
- Ensure that **risk assessment** remains in the domain of **"scientifically sound".**
- Ensure the **maximum transparency in the use of scientific evidence.** When scientific evidence is used only partially, it is essential that decision makers explain the reasons why some evidence was rejected**.**

REGULATORY FRAMEWORK ON GMOs

- **Increase the predictability, and where possible, simplify the regulatory framework on GMOs** by promoting the reduction of technical and/or procedural requirements for certain categories of GMOs if the accumulated scientific evidence allows for it. The continuous intensification of the regulatory system, against mounting scientific evidence on safety, has resulted in the creation of an unnecessary and insurmountable hurdle for public research institutions, and has driven private business away from the EU.

APPROVAL OF GMOs

- **Ensure that EU rules are applied as they are written and were intended** in supporting the approval for cultivation of all GM crops of which **EFSA's independent evaluations** have shown to be as **safe** as their non-modified counterparts.
- Urge the European Commission to avoid **undue delays** by submitting dossiers for vote once they have received an opinion from EFSA.

INFORMATION OF EU CITIZENS

- Demand the European Commission take further **actions** to disseminate to **European citizens** the results of **EU funded research on the potential, benefits and safety** of GMOs. While this research was entirely paid by European tax payers, its outcome is still largely unknown by to the public in Europe and way too little is done to adequately disseminate the conclusions drawn from it.

SUPPORT RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

- Guarantee that the **priorities** of the Agriculture and Bioeconomy pillar of **Horizon 2020** are pursued and **public research in modern agricultural biotechnology** adequately funded.

- Ensure the smart functioning of the European **Innovation Partnership for Agricultural Sustainability and Productivity** for reducing the **gap between farmers and science** and facilitating knowledge exchange.

COEXISTENCE

- Secure the principle that **no form of agricultural production** (conventional, organic, or agriculture using GMOs) **is excluded** in the European Union.
- Support the freedom of **choice of farmers** to select the crops they find best suited for their needs, and secure that any restriction of that choice is **predictable, proportionate, non-discriminatory** and based on substantive, persuasive **proven** evidence.

MISAPPLICATION OF NATIONAL SAFEGUARD CLAUSES

- Urge the Commission to abide by the law and start the procedure for the **withdrawal** of all the national '**safeguard clauses'** prohibiting GMOs **without a valid scientific justification**.

SEED

- Support the adoption of **clear and realistic standards** for achieving **workable cultivation conditions** both for GM and non-GM growers. There is an urgent need of a **new proposal on technical thresholds** for labelling GMO traces in conventional seeds at the lowest practicable, proportionate and functional levels for all economic operators.

1. AgroBiotechRom (Romania, www.agrobiotechrom.ro)
2. Liga Asociatiilor Producatorilor Agricoli din Romania (LAPAR, Romania, http://www.lapar.org)
3. Saf agr'iDées (France, http://www.agriculteursdefrance.com)
4. Asociación Agraria Jóvenes Agricultores (ASAJA, Spain, www.asajanet.com)
5. Asociación de Productores de Vacuno de Carne (Asoprovac, Spain, http://www.asoprovac.com)
6. Association Française des Biotechnologies Végétales (AFBV, www.biotechnologies-vegetales.com)
7. FuturAgra (Italy, www.futuragra.it)
8. InnoPlanta (Germany, www.innoplanta.de)
9. National Farmers Union (NFU, UK, www.nfuonline.com)
10. Conservation Agriculture Association (APOSOLO, Portugal, www.aposolo.pt)
11. Association of Cereal producers (Anpoc, Portugal, http://anpoc.pt/)
12. Public Research and Regulation Initiative (PRRI, www.prri.net).

If you are willing to commit to these measures, please contact the informal secretariat of the FSN at: fabio.niespolo@futuragra.it