

Practical aspects of Estonian seed legislation and recent developments

In Estonia seed legislation states that marketing and exchange of non-registered varieties is illegal as seed exchange is considered as marketing. Seeds of species that are not on the EU plant list can be sold, for example swede and dill. In the framework of the Growing Seed Savers project a discussion on these subjects were started in 2019 between members of NGO Maadjas and Estonian officials. NGO Maadjas is a member of the Commission on Genetic Resources of Agricultural Plants led by the Ministry of Rural Affairs since 2014 and this has enabled a platform for regular discussions with authorities. The NGO Maadjas' presence in the Commission helped a lot in reaching a common understanding. The seed savers require legislation permitting the marketing of heritage plant seeds in order to increase cultivated biodiversity. After numerous meetings, a solution was found to improve the Estonian seed legislation. Through cooperation positive changes were achieved and there is now a hope for a change in the present legislation in favour of increasing biodiversity among cultivated plants.

The first discussion on marketing of heritage seeds was held at the Ministry of Rural Affairs the 5th of May 2019 and at this point seed-savers and authorities had different understanding on how rules should be interpreted or changed. The need for marketing of heritage seeds was in general not entirely familiar to the representatives of the authorities. On the 6th of September 2019 NGO Maadjas arranged a seed legislation meeting entitled "How can heritage plants be saved?" in the Estonian Open-Air Museum. Guest lecturers from Denmark and Latvia participated. Further meetings took place and talks about changes in administrative practices aiming at hobby growers to apply for seeds from the national gene bank was started. On 16th of January 2020 the Ministry of Rural Affairs invited NGO Maadjas to a small round-table meeting where it was discussed in detail how the situation on selling heritage seeds could be improved. It was discussed if there was a need to mention heritage seeds at all or only to focus on small amounts of seeds sold by hobby growers. We looked particularly at the change that the Finnish have implemented in their new seed legislation (600/2019). There was also a discussion on who may be opposing such a change and what kind of impact this would have on the seed market in general. 8th April 2020 NGO Maadjas made a comment upon the organic farming law concerning plant reproduction and sort protection (20-0321/01) in order to make changes allowing marketing of small seed amounts for hobby end users in general. This law requires a change in the main seed marketing law. Our suggestion is that hobby growers selling small amounts of seeds to end users will not be concerned by the seed law.



Decision support tree for seed marketing and exchange in Estonia

I would like to distribute my home grown plant seeds.
What should I know and how to do it legally?

