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French-Austrian Conference on Plant-Based Proteins

# **Declaration by the Agricultural Ministers of France Julien Denormandie and of Austria Elisabeth Köstinger on Plant-Based Proteins**

„Towards a European protein strategy and thereby  
increasing the EU's self-sufficiency“

# Declaration

## Enhancing the potential of plant-based proteins in Europe

The transition towards sustainable food systems is essential for addressing the current environmental and climate challenges faced by the European agricultural sector. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the great resilience of the European agriculture, which was consistently able to supply our citizens with sufficient, safe, affordable and high-quality food. **Maintaining functioning, sustainable, and resilient food supply chains is crucial for our future.**

To achieve this goal, we need to make the best possible use of the potential of the European agriculture, especially with regard to the cultivation of plant-based proteins. Due to the capability to fix nitrogen from the air, increasing the production of legumes or protein crops is a response to the dependencies in mineral nitrogen and plant-based proteins, but also to address environmental issues. Moreover, the increased cultivation of legumes will contribute to a more sustainable and diversified agriculture, less dependent on external mineral fertilizer inputs. The further development of legumes will contribute equally to addressing the environmental and climatic challenges faced by the European agricultural sector while meeting the objectives of the European Green Deal. Promoting legumes will moreover enhance food security and sovereignty in the EU, while decreasing our dependence on imports and the risk of greater deforestation in third countries.

**In order to face these challenges, both France and Austria have developed national protein strategies.** The Austrian and French strategies include several measures fostering the production of plant-based proteins. These measures aim at increasing sustainable production, leveraging the positive impacts of the cultivation of plant-based proteins on the climate and the environment, and address food aspects such as processing capacities, research and innovation. **However, the protein sector as well as research and sustainable innovation have to be further strengthened at European level.**

Today, developing the production of plant-based proteins in Europe remains one of the most efficient ways to counter both environmental and climate challenges. In line with the

objectives set out in the “Fit for 55”-Package and the “Farm to Fork” EU strategy, enhancing the domestic cultivation of plant-based proteins can be a way to mitigate challenges such as deforestation, biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation in countries outside the EU, while ensuring high environmental, health and quality food standards in Europe. Thus, we have to:

- strengthen domestic production of plant-based proteins that meet our high European standards;
- shorten transportation routes with regional supply chains, ensure the logistical development of this sector and secure a functioning and regional value chain including processing capacities for food and feed;
- contribute to making protein crops fit for future by effective plant breeding tailored to the individual needs of all the actors, from farmer to processor and consumer;
- promote the diversification of protein intake by eating legumes from local production in line with official recommendations on nutrition and health;
- jointly bring this topic before the Standing Committee for Agricultural Research (SCAR) and support research and innovation, in particular through collaborative and trans-national research programmes on plant proteins and nitrogen cycle in the Horizon Europe programme.

Such undertakings will significantly contribute to building the EU’s Strategic Autonomy while preserving an open economy, as set out in the conclusions adopted by the European Council and in the Trade Policy Review of the European Commission and the goals of the European Green Deal.

**We therefore call on the European Commission to build upon its report on the development of plant proteins in the European Union published in 2018 and to work out a European protein strategy taking into account the national efforts of Member States.** Such strategy should be in line with and support the goals of the Green Deal and cover all aspects from boosting sustainable production to securing an effective processing sector for food and feed. This should also include the support of research and innovation.

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