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NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Council
Subject:	Enhancing the potential of plant-based proteins in Europe in line with the objectives set out in the European Green Deal <i>- Information from the Austrian delegation</i>

With a view to an 'Any other business' item at the Council ('Agriculture and Fisheries') on 21 March 2022, delegations will find in the Annex a note from the Austrian delegation on the above-mentioned subject.

Enhancing the potential of plant-based proteins in Europe in line with the objectives set out in the European Green Deal**Note from the Austrian delegation, supported by Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain**

1. On 22 November 2018, the European Commission published its *report on the development of plant proteins in the European Union*¹, with the intention to meet its commitment taken during the adoption process for Regulation (EU) 2017/2393. In this context, a conference took place in Vienna from 22 to 23 November 2018 focusing on the opportunities and challenges of developing plant proteins in the European Union.
2. On 17 December 2021, Austria and France held a joint conference on plant-based proteins. The conference provided a platform for discussion among experts and stakeholders and resulted in a Joint Ministerial Declaration. During the conference, the need and the benefits of increasing the Union's production of plant-based proteins have been highlighted.
3. Plant-based proteins are essential and indispensable components of human nutrition as well as animal feed and contribute to the objectives of the Common Agricultural Policy 2023-2027 (CAP) and the European Green Deal. Therefore, they are crucial for the transition towards sustainable food systems. The increased cultivation of legumes contributes to a more sustainable and diversified agriculture and decreases dependence on external mineral fertilizer inputs. It also contributes to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and thereby addresses the environmental and climatic challenges faced by the European agricultural sector.

¹ COM(2018) 757 final

4. The demand of plant-based proteins is expected to continuously increase globally and within the Union in the future. At the same time, the EU already has a major deficit in plant proteins, leaving it dependent on imports from third countries, which are often linked to deforestation and biodiversity loss.
5. Especially during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the current war in Ukraine, the critical importance of maintaining well-functioning agro-ecosystems, and sustainable, and resilient food supply chains becomes more apparent.
6. In fact, the war in Ukraine has made the need to move towards greater European food self-sufficiency a top priority, especially in the area of plant proteins. The EU agriculture and its food sector must assure the availability of sufficient food supplies in line with the objectives in Article 39 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. Relevant policy initiatives such as the Green Deal and the Farm to Fork strategy should therefore equally contribute to these goals by fostering the Union's food sovereignty and decreasing its reliance on imports. Thus, the Versailles declaration of the Heads of State and Government of 10-11 March adequately reflects the vital need to safeguard food security by reducing the EU's dependencies on imported agricultural products and inputs.
7. In order to adequately address this issue, a common European approach and therefore a European protein strategy that focuses, among other things, on the following is deemed necessary:
 - strengthening a sustainable domestic production of plant-based proteins, produced in accordance with the high European standards;
 - developing and expanding regional value chains and regional processing capacities to shorten transportation between the place of production and the place of consumption;
 - continuously collaborating with institutions and agricultural organizations to promote the cultivation and use of domestic plant proteins in the food and feed industry;

- fostering research and innovation in the area of plant-based proteins along the entire value chain and for need-oriented and optimized use of plant-based protein sources;
 - further increasing crop potential by improving and broadening breeding strategies;
 - emphasizing promotion and market potential and development;
 - expanding education and advisory services and knowledge transfer;
 - enabling and facilitating protein-crop production on ecological focus areas.
8. The supporting Member States call on the European Commission to build upon its report on the development of plant proteins in the European Union published in 2018 by working out a European protein strategy, taking into account national strategies and practices, tailored to the individual needs and agronomical circumstances of Member States. Furthermore, such strategy shall foster research and innovation, in particular within the framework of Horizon Europe, promote the diversification of protein intake, and its use for feed production, and incorporate all the above-mentioned priorities.
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