While it is premature to specify the precise network governance structure, an example of how it might operate is given here. Two main governing bodies, both of which would include a balanced representation of all stakeholder groups (see ‘Network membership’) and whose members will be elected on a periodic rolling basis, could be established:

1. An executive committee: A decision-making body that would have overall responsibility for the management of the network, including policy development and budget control.
2. A council: A representative body comprising the members of the executive committee and review and approve its outputs, including policy plans, budget and accounts. Council members could be elected by network members (organizations and individuals) through a process of nomination and voting.

Meetings of the above two bodies would take place on a regular basis.

A general assembly could be periodically convened to allow network members to discuss and vote on issues pertaining to the management of the network, such as contributing to the development of network policy.

A secretariat would be established by the executive committee to allow network members to discuss and vote on issues pertaining to the management of the network.

National governments would play a vital role in the membership of the network, linking it to relevant policy and legislative instruments, and in contributing to the development of network policy and legislative instruments.

The network would be funded through:
- Network membership (see ‘Network membership’).
- Contributions by other governments.
- Contributions by project partners and others.
- Contributions by funding agencies and donors.
- Membership fees.
- Other funding agencies and donors.

Network governance

How will the network operate?

For further information

If you are interested in learning more about the network and/or about the Farmer’s Pride project and related initiatives, please sign up to our mailing list and visit our website.

www.farmerspride.eu

Plant genetic resources—the diversity of crops, their varieties and wild relatives—are essential for food security, economic and livelihood security, as well as for associated cultures. However, these resources are being eroded by a range of factors—including intensive land management, unsuitable legal and policy frameworks, and climate change—and current efforts to prevent them are insufficient to halt or reverse this trend.

The EU-funded Farmer’s Pride project has brought together a range of actors representing the full suite of stakeholders with an interest in conserving and using plant genetic resources in situ (on-farm, in garden and in the wild). The project has laid foundations for a regional network of site, populations and stakeholders—an European network for in situ conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources.

This document explains the rationale for the establishment of the network, the aim and objectives of the network, who would be involved, what the benefits of membership would be, and how it would operate.

Why establish this network?

In current times of global transformation—including the increasing human population and climate changes—there is an urgent need to sustain our food supplies than ever before as the environmental conditions in which crops are cultivated become increasingly modified, changeable and uncertain. In the face of these challenges, our food security and livelihood security depend on the conservation and continual availability of a wide range of plant genetic resources for use by farmers, researchers and plant breeders to improve and improve our crops—for example, to provide resistance to extreme and uncertain climatic events, and to associated and disease outbreaks. Diverse, locally adapted cultivated varieties (‘landraces’ or ‘farmers’ varieties’) and wild relatives of crops are rich sources of this diversity, and therefore provide valuable resources to farmers and breeders to build resilience in agriculture. However, these resources are threatened by a range of factors.

Landrace cultivation has decreased significantly due to a range of economic, social, legal and demographic factors, and this has led to a corresponding loss of the valuable wild relative diversity that is being eroded by unsustainable and intensive land management, degradation and loss of habitats, particularly due to development for tourism and expansion of non-agricultural infrastructure. Climate change is threatening both cultivated and wild plant genetic resources due to changing environmental conditions and associated pests and diseases, as well as an increase in occurrence and severity of extreme weather events.

The conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources can help to ensure the location where they are cultivated in the case of landraces/Farmers’
varieties or their natural habitats in the case of wild species—be backed up in a gene bank or ex situ in a collection, access to material to be conserved, and facility to access to material by farmers, researchers and plant breeders. The need for such a diversity which is continually adapting to local environmental and management conditions.

The value of these resources and the threats affecting them are recognized by global policy and legal instruments to which the European Union (EU) in Europe are parties—most notably, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the United Nations Convention of the Global Plan of Action for the Conservation and Sustainable Utilization of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (GAP) adopted in 1995, the subsequent GAP II in force since 2001, and the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA) in force since 2004. In addition, the maintenance of plant genetic resources is fundamental in the context of the European Green Deal, as well as the CBD and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

Despite the biodiversity lost to agriculture and landscapes, there is no framework that provides a mechanism for the management of plant genetic resources and conservation and sustainable use across Europe. Consequently, in-situ management of plant genetic resources, with complementary ex-situ conservation, is currently underprovided, underdeveloped and underutilized to streamline and strengthen our efforts, and to increase the diversity available to support future agriculture; we need an effective and lasting network for in-situ conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources, as well as appropriate support mechanisms in place to permanently embed it within the European biodiversity framework.

**Aim and objectives of the network**

The aim is to create a permanent system for Europe-wide in-situ conservation of plant genetic resources, including associated complementary conservation by situ, and critically, to promote and facilitate the use of more diversity for the benefit of society. It is therefore proposed to establish a network that will comprise a) specific localities where plant genetic resources are protected by national or regional minimum standards; b) the custodians of those localities through government frameworks; c) the direct and indirect users of plant genetic resources—farmers, gardeners, communities, researchers, and the public and private plant breeding and seed sectors; and d) other actors with an interest in conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources.

To achieve this, the network will:

- Establish a process for the identification, validation and formal recognition of crop wild relative and landrace/farmers’ varieties populations, and the custodians (see ‘Custodian members’).
- Afford technical support to members (sustaining and non-sustaining) in the maintenance of their populations, and promote best practices for their conservation.
- Develop a strategy to increase awareness of the value of in situ conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources amongst the stakeholders community, including the general public.
- Leverage resources to support research and development initiatives for improved in situ conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources.
- Provide a platform and tools to connect the diverse actors in situ plant genetic resources conservation and sustainable use—including farmers, protected area managers, plant breeders, community seed banks, policymakers, researchers and other interest groups.
- Impart reliable information and offer technical support to national plant genetic resources programs to assist in the development of relevant international conventions and processes, and influence policy change to support the conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources.

**Network membership**

Who would be members of the network?

To achieve these goals, the network will be effectively a cross-sector, multi-actor collaboration—on the one hand, public and strengthen networking, partnerships, organizations and processes across the spectrum of plant genetic resources conservation and sustainable use actors—this need means that the network would involve:

- The managers of plant genetic resources populations—farmers, gardeners, communities, private and public protected area managers, local government and other local managers, private and public seed/gene bank curators, including orchards, community seed banks, field gene banks and community gardens;
- The direct and indirect users of plant genetic resources—farmers, gardeners, communities, researchers, and the public and private plant breeding and seed sectors;
- Other actors with an interest in conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources—researchers, policymakers, educators, and other interest groups.

**Types of membership**

It is anticipated that both organizations and individuals would be able to join the network:

- **Organization membership**:
  - National governments:
    - To manage these important genetic resources on their territory, it is anticipated that two types of members will be recognized:
    - **Custodian members**: For those managing plant genetic resources populations that are securely backed up in a gene bank or other repository and providing added value to your conservation related special certification scheme, and provide a unique gene bank living collections. This may for example, increase opportunities for landscape plant marketing through a conservation-focused research or providing added value to your conservation and development of diversity on-farm and in garden, and to ensure the implementation of the provisions of the new European network (see ‘Organization membership’). Specifically, membership of the network would:
  - For custodian members—
    - Land recognition at national and regional levels and sustainable use of plant genetic resources conservation and sustainable use resources—farmers, gardeners, communities, providing added value to your conservation will be a powerful force for influencing policymakers and to influence policy change.
    - Provide a platform and tools to connect the diverse actors in situ plant genetic resources conservation and sustainable use across Europe. Consequently, in-situ management of plant genetic resources, with complementary ex-situ conservation, is currently underprovided, underdeveloped and underutilized to streamline and strengthen our efforts, and to increase the diversity available to support future agriculture; we need an effective and lasting network for in-situ conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources, as well as appropriate support mechanisms in place to permanently embed it within the European biodiversity framework.
  - For non-custodian members—
    - Afford secure back-up of in situ managed genetic resources conservation and sustainable use resource populations—farmers, gardeners, communities, providing added value to your conservation related special certification scheme, and provide a unique gene bank living collections. This may for example, increase opportunities for landscape plant marketing through a conservation-focused research or providing added value to your conservation and development of diversity on-farm and in garden, and to ensure the implementation of the provisions of the new European network (see ‘Organization membership’). Specifically, membership of the network would:
    - For custodian members—
      - Land recognition at national and regional levels and sustainable use of plant genetic resources conservation and sustainable use resources—farmers, gardeners, communities, providing added value to your conservation will be a powerful force for influencing policymakers and to influence policy change.
      - Provide a platform and tools to connect the diverse actors in situ plant genetic resources conservation and sustainable use across Europe. Consequently, in-situ management of plant genetic resources, with complementary ex-situ conservation, is currently underprovided, underdeveloped and underutilized to streamline and strengthen our efforts, and to increase the diversity available to support future agriculture; we need an effective and lasting network for in-situ conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources, as well as appropriate support mechanisms in place to permanently embed it within the European biodiversity framework.