



Sector of Plant reproductive materials



World leader in seeds and young plants

The Netherlands has over 250 plant breeding and propagation companies. They develop new varieties and produce and market plant reproductive materials for use in agriculture and horticulture: seeds, bulbs, cuttings and young plants. By developing better agronomic traits and more appealing products, companies in the sector make a positive contribution to tackling societal challenges such as food security, health and sustainability.

The Netherlands is the world's biggest exporter of seeds and young plants, and the sector provides jobs for over 12,000 people. In other words, Dutch breeding and propagation companies are of major importance to the Dutch economy. The sector depends on a favourable investment and business climate in order to maintain this leading position. Plantum therefore calls on the government to continue to support the sector through its effective policies and conducive legislation.

Good-quality seeds and young plants offer financial advantages for the entire chain, from the grower to the consumer/society as a whole, and everyone else in between. A few examples:

- Growers benefit from healthy and strong seeds and young plants because they generate high yields and reduce crop protection costs;
- Freight forwarders and retailers reap the benefits of products with a longer shelf life; less spoilage means less lost revenue;
- Consumers eat more healthy food if it is affordable, tasty and appealing; healthier lifestyles result in lower healthcare costs.

The tomato seed supply chain is a good illustration of the potential financial value of seeds and young plants; just one kilo of high-quality seed ultimately produces €10 million worth of tomatoes (see Figure 1 below).

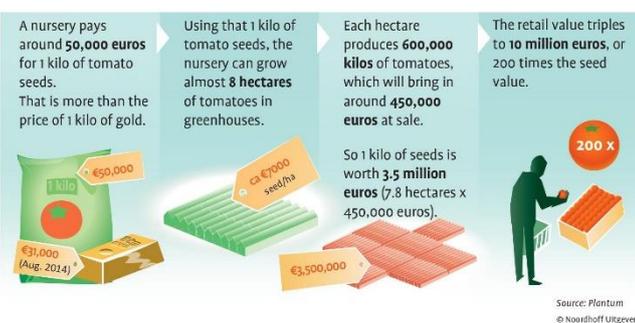


Figure 1: The ultimate financial value of seeds and young plants is very high

Strong export position

Dutch breeding and propagation companies add value for growers all over the world, from large rose producers in Colombia to small-scale potato farmers in Kenya and organic lettuce growers in California. In 2016, Dutch companies exported €2.7 billion worth of plant reproductive materials, and exports are still on the rise. Those companies are active in over a hundred countries and collaborate with knowledge institutions at home and abroad. Dutch organisations and companies play a key role in quality control too.

Exceptionally innovative

Because customers are placing ever-higher demands on seeds and young plants, innovation is of vital importance for the sector's future. Dutch companies invest an average of 15% – and some even up to 30% – of revenue in research and development, much more than pharmaceutical or electronic industries. The Netherlands is securing a world-leading position for itself in the development of new varieties. This is underlined by the fact that more than 30% of applications for plant breeders' rights in Europe are made by Dutch breeders.



Figure 2: Applications for plant breeders' rights in Europe over the past 20 years

Effective policy is needed

Government policy should be targeted at stimulating innovation, including:

- Effective plant breeders' rights in the Netherlands and beyond;
- Good access to genetic resources, based on clear rules;
- Clarity on the use of the latest breeding methods;
- Stimulation of research and innovation and the Netherlands' knowledge infrastructure;
- Facilitation of public-private partnerships;
- Well-functioning inspection bodies for seeds and young plants in the international market;
- Clear rules for plant health, based on scientific facts and an effective system of control.

In order to ensure that the Netherlands can maintain and further build on its leading position, Plantum continues to lobby for the development of policies and rules that stimulate innovation and market access.

Strong foundation

The Netherlands did not become so strong in seeds and young plants overnight; the first pioneering vegetable growers started selecting and trading seeds some 200 years ago in response to the rapid urbanisation of cities like Amsterdam and Rotterdam. What was then known as the Rijkslandbouwschool ('National Agricultural College') in Wageningen began conducting research into seeds in 1867. Since then, the government has invested substantially in plant research at universities, and the industry itself has always been heavily involved too. Among other things, that collaboration between the public and private sectors resulted in the Netherlands becoming the first country to introduce plant breeders' rights in 1941.