



Grain legumes in Finland - Ground for Growth networking event¹

Ground for Growth organized a networking event that took place on the 28th of November 2019 in Helsinki, Tieteiden talo. Various actors from pulse-based value chains attended the event. This included representatives from research institutes, universities, extension services, food and plant breeding companies and processors. The event started with a suite of presentations from different experts:

- Independent pulse-expert Kirsi Kaikkonen gave a short presentation on plant proteins in the value chain, in which she stressed that the development of faba beans and peas should not lag behind soybeans
- Georg Carlsson from the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, spoke about the grain legume situation in Sweden and said that Finland is many ways ahead of Sweden in product development
- Stefan Bäckman from the University of Helsinki, shared his experiences on the profitability of grain legumes at farm level
- Casimir Schauman from the University of Helsinki, presented Legumes Translated. He stated that the project is an opportunity to share knowledge and expertise with various value chain actors from Europe. He also stated, that it is also a coordinated effort to promote an EU-wide transition to increase legume production and consumption.

Jouko Riihimäki from Jalofoods and Casimir Schauman introduced the topic of establishing an association focussed on pulses/legumes in Finland by taking inspiration from other legume associations that are currently active in Europe. The event ended with a workshop with the aim to discuss how collaboration between various value chain actors can be improved in Finland.

Workshop results

Group 1

The group felt that an association for grain legumes could prove useful in Finland. The conversation began by mapping out some key conditions for success. This includes a sufficiently broad base of participants (especially commercial actors) followed by a clear division of responsibility. Economic opportunities (not just ideological backgrounds) should be taken into account. The work should be driven by an independent body that would ensure credibility and neutrality.

The discussion brought the following aspects to the fore in light of establishing an association:

- ability to present concrete benefits to the farmer. This can also be progressed by organizing trainings on farms. The benefits of crop rotations should be communicated to farmers
- need to increase the consumption of pulses in public food services & commercial kitchens
- foster cooperation between commercial actors and research institutes in the breeding of new varieties
- promote legume-derived products for national but also export purposes

¹ The summary text was originally produced in Finnish.

- Grain legumes should not be seen as an “alternative” protein. Instead, they could and should be seen as an “original” source of protein
- The health effects to public health also need to be highlighted - a need to increase communication efforts with consumers remains important
- In the value chain, it is important to build trust and cooperation throughout the production chain and avoid confrontation between different actors
- Networking with international actors
- The group proposed a national goal for Finland: legumes would cover 10% of Finland's total arable land

Group 2

This group set out the following conditions for success:

- A common goal that appeals to the farmer and the consumer
- Long-term commitment to the cause
- Closer collaboration with the research community
- Information and consumer research
- Establishment of a centre of excellence
- Extensive export strategy
- Cooperation and trust is key when developing value chains

The group suggested learning from the existing Oat Association in Finland, which according to the group has successfully promoted oats far and wide.

It was felt that there is a need to promote awareness among different target groups in combination with a knowledge hub. Home gardeners is also a target group to consider.

The group also discussed the need to communicate more effectively the favourable qualities of pulses in general. This includes highlighting their pre-growth value, ability to improve soils and their effect on climate change. Pulses are very versatile as raw materials. This should be communicated to the food industry and consumers.

Group 3

The group began by pointing out that consumer demand is driving the development of pulses. The group spoke in favour of establishing an association for pulses. Its main tasks could include:

- Lobbying for research funding e.g. for plant breeding
- The association would be able to advise and help define legume quality requirements for both feed and food purposes
- Raise awareness of the different benefits of pulses (nutritional, soil and climate benefits)
- Address both feed and food quality issues
- Raise farmers' awareness concerning their farming systems and how they would benefit from pulses, taking into account their delayed benefits (pre-crop value)
- The association can also advance research-related questions: what information needs do we currently have and what should we devote time to in the long-term
- Helps farmers understand the legume market

The group also saw that the association could act as a coordinating body that identifies the needs of the industry, helps different actors to find good partners and, more broadly, form closer cooperation between different actors.

The group ended the discussion by saying that in order to do all of this - it boils down to finding a suitable candidate for the work.

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