The next level:
A Community Seed House –
Opportunities and challenges

Seeds of Growth

SEMÍNKOVNA
SÁZEJ, SKLÍZEJ, SDÍLEJ...

LET'S LIBERATE
DIVERSITY!

SEED
Som fir d'Erhalen
an d'Entwécklung
vun der Diversitéit

A seed house
as a new concept for
Community Seed Initiatives



Frank Adams, seed artisan, teacher and trainer,
secretary of SEED Luxembourg / Prague, 6/10/26

Community Seed Initiatives

History

- 'Seed Savers' founded in 1975 in the USA

Objectives

- Save your own seeds and help save seed diversity and autonomy
- Object: "heirloom varieties" - "non-hybrid varieties"

Definitions

- Seed-saving: cultivate/harvest/store seeds for subsequent seasons
- Seed-saving: save heirloom varieties from disappearing

Narrative

- Hybrid seeds and Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) compromise seed sovereignty and increase dependance of farmers



Terminology

The Seed Savers terminology was somehow a reaction to the industrialisation of seeds - new terms were coined in juxtaposition to industrial seeds:

	Industrial terminology	**Seed Savers terminology**
Property aspect	Breeders certificates (and later patents)	Seeds as commons against 'biopiracy'
Botanical aspect	Hybrid varieties	Open-pollinated varieties or true-to-seed varieties
Genetic aspect	Homogeneous varieties	Population varieties or genetically diverse varieties
Economic aspect	Commercial high-yielding varieties (HYV)	Peasant seeds, landraces and heirloom seeds
Political aspect	Certified quality guarantee seeds	Seed sovereignty thanks to regional varieties

Community Seed Initiatives

Narrative

- When objectives and terminology are settled, a narrative is the next step.
- The opposition to centralisation, standardisation and privatisation of seed is not enough to develop a substantial narrative.
- It is important to develop a narrative that describes vision, mission, values, ambitions and strategies of CSI and that uses CSI terms for that.



Official terminology for CSI	Context
Community Seed Banks' (CSB)	FAO Revised 2nd Global Plan of Action for Phytogenetic Resources for Food and Agriculture
'Conservation organisations and networks'	EU PRM Regulation 2026

Community Seed Initiatives



Diversity Narrative:

Community Seed Initiatives such as **seed swaps, seed libraries, seed networks, seed banks and seed houses** promote **cultivated biodiversity**, which encompasses

- **diversity between varieties**,
- **diversity within varieties**, and
- **evolutionary diversity**

at intraregional and interregional levels.

These aspects of cultivated biodiversity are considered indispensable pillars for sustainable and crisis-proof food systems.

CSI are "living initiatives" by their practices of using, selecting, multiplying, and sharing seeds of diversity varieties.

Furthermore, CSI do not only consider the **seeds**, but also the **people** behind them as well as their technical **knowledge** and the history of their varieties. In an even larger context, they may also support social cohesion, agroecological food production, regional systems and circular economy.

Community seed swaps, seed libraries, seed banks, seed networks and seed houses

Proposals* for definitions to distinguish different forms of community initiatives for seed diversity concerning their level of coordination (for internal terminology)

	Description	**Level of coordination**
Seed swap and exchange	Amateur gardeners exchange their home-grown seeds on an annual fair organised by an association or a municipality	Low: there is no permanent structure, gardeners manage the exchange on the spot, in general, seed quality is not supervised
Seed Library	Amateur gardeners exchange their home-grown seeds in a public place (permanent)	Moderate: permanent structure, coordination of seed flow, standardised packaging, in general, seed quality is not supervised
Community Seed Network	A coordinated decentralised initiative with mobile equipment or the purpose of diversity safeguard	Considerable: seed planning, cultivation, harvest, processing, storage, stock management and distribution are coordinated and seed quality is supervised
Community Seed Bank	A coordinated centralised initiative in equipped premises for the purpose of diversity safeguard	
Community Seed House	A coordinated well-equipped initiative with a permanent office for educational and political work (centre for a decentralised network)	High: improved seed selection and management, supervised seed quality, regular meetings and public events, communication and publication, education, political work

* Definitions and distinct categories may be useful for internal development and external recognition of community seed initiatives

How to progress towards the founding of a seed house?

What is a Community Seed House?

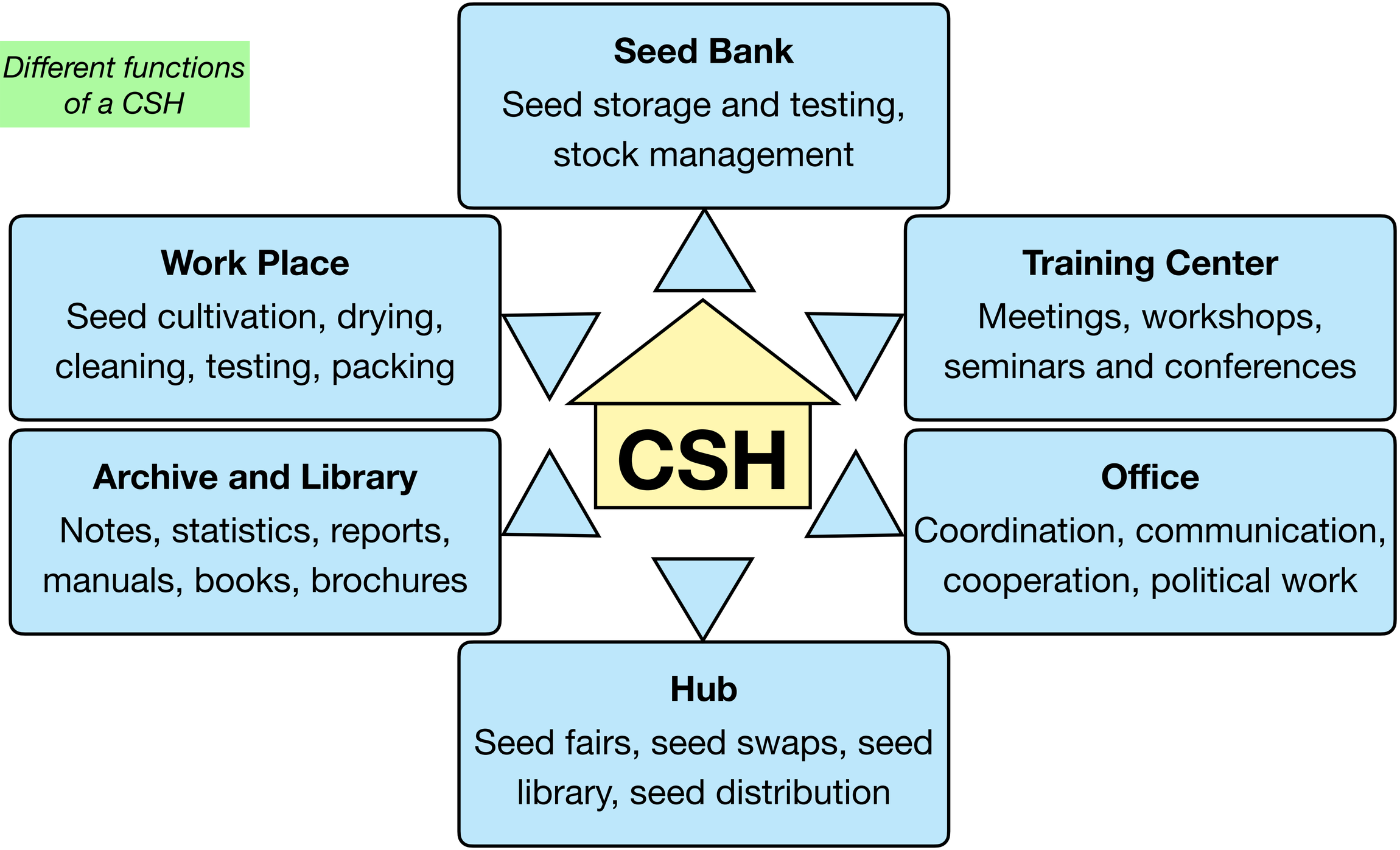
- No official definition of a seed house yet
- Term coined in Latin American peasant seed systems (*casas de semillas*)
- *Réseau Semences Paysannes* started using the term as a concept
- Not necessarily a real house

A context,

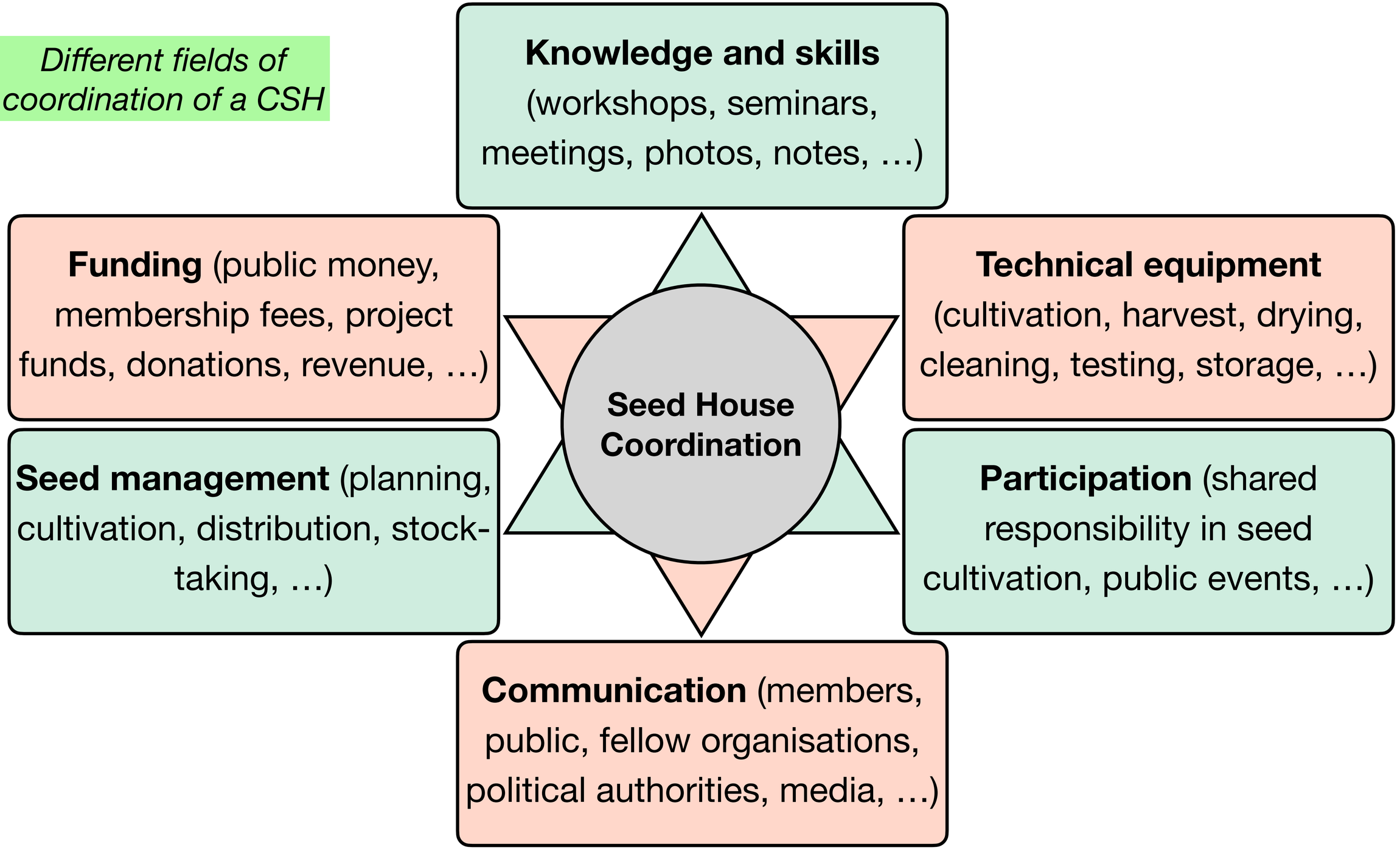
- where seeds, people, and knowledge come together
- which provides a common centre for a decentralised network
- which has a profile, an identity that foster public and political recognition
- with which members can identify and where they can get involved
- which is equipped with good technical facilities
- which promotes improved seed quality standards
- which spreads information and news in society
- which facilitates exchanges, learning processes and their documentation



Different functions of a CSH



Different fields of coordination of a CSH



How to progress towards the founding of a seed house?

Specific issues need to be addressed regarding the funding and the coordination of a Community Seed House:

Funding

- Members' contributions and donations
- Membership and seminar fees
- Revenues from seeds
- Project funds
- State support
- Support from municipalities, educational institutions, cultural centres,

Communication

- Members
- General public
- Political authorities
- Other diversity initiatives
- Fellow organisations
- Educational or social institutions
- Research centers

Cultivation and Training

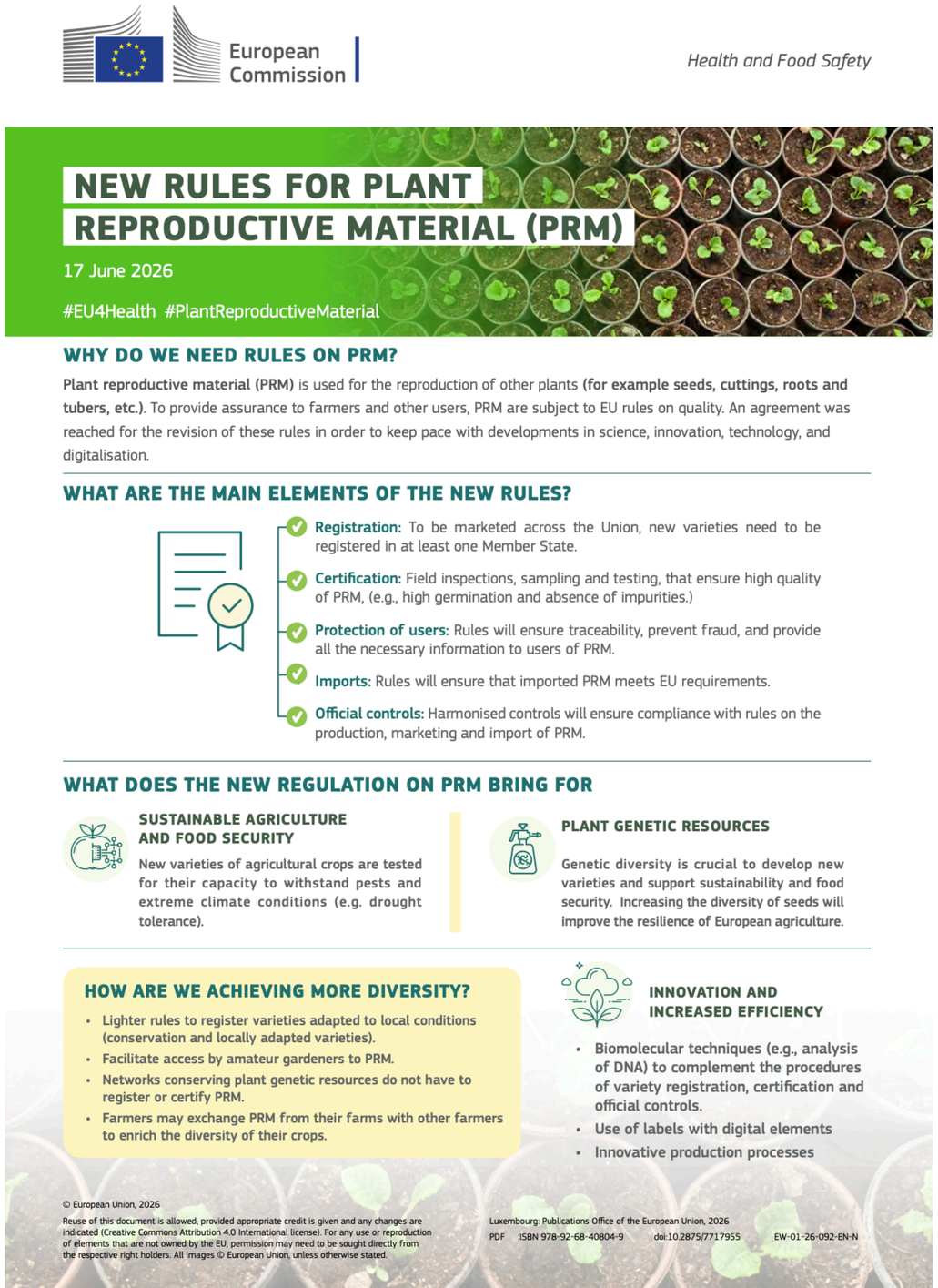
- Planing of seed bearers
- Organising training sessions
- Public events (conferences, fairs, …)
- Seed stock management
- Seed distribution

House Rules

- Rules for seed origin and quality
- Rules for seed distribution
- Rules for engagement of members
- Responsibilities of the coordination team
- Meetings of the collective

The new PRM regulation - what's new for CSI?

- The new EU Regulation on the marketing of seeds ('plant reproductive material' – PRM) is expected to come into force not before 2030.
- It will eliminate national differences in the laws on seed marketing so that some countries lose and others gain leeway for diversity.
- A new register for 'professional operators' is established, they have new obligations to notify the species multiplied and keep records of quantities and traceability for six years.
- There are different derogations concerning administrative burden for operators, networks and organisations who work for diversity.



The new PRM regulation - what's new for CSI?

Some specific points that are interesting for CSI:

- Conservation organisations, networks, and their members **can sell PRM if the sale is not for profit**. It will be explicitly allowed to **market seeds from unregistered varieties to amateur gardeners**.
- Conservation organisations, networks, and their members **do not need to register as 'professional operators'** but "*should notify their activity to the competent national authorities and keep a register with the relevant information of the PRM produced and marketed by or to them*".
- Conservation organisations, networks, and their members are - like anybody else - subject to the Plant Health Regulation concerning the notification of quarantine pests; if they market PRM only in direct sale and not through online shops, they do not need to issue Plant Passports. On top of this, according to the new PRM regulation, their **seeds must be 'practically free' from quality pests** (visual assessment).

The new PRM regulation - what's new for CSI?

	Exempt from scope?	Clarification	Legal derogations and requirements
Gene banks	Totally	Seed transfer not considered as 'marketing'	Requirements outside PRM regulation: • Material transfer protocols • Plant health protocols
Seed libraries	Totally?	If considered as seed swap between amateur gardeners	Seed swaps between amateur gardeners are completely exempted from the scope; question is, if a seed library would be considered as conservation network (see below)
	Partially?	If considered as network with a central operator	
Community seed banks	Partially	All are categorised as 'conservation organisations and networks'	Conservation organisations and networks • do not need to register as 'professional operators', • should notify their activity to the competent authorities, • keep a register with the relevant information of the PRM produced and marketed by or to them.
Community seed networks			
Community seed houses			

Conservation organisations and networks may be recognized as official gene banks by their national competent authorities.

Objectives for Community Seed Initiatives (2026-2030)

- **Work out a 'positive narrative':**
  - Indispensable services of CSI for seed diversity and sustainable food production
  - Terminology and definitions that are in line with the diversity spirit
  - Objective: Gain greater public attention and greater political recognition
- **Design concepts for regional diversity seed systems:**
  - Assert the distinction between seed diversity work and commercial seed marketing
  - Make diversity seeds circulate without being subject to market rules
  - Create regional community systems that can legally include farmers, market and amateur gardeners, associations, municipalities, …
- **Evaluate the options to get a similar status as state gene banks:**
  - Evaluate options for progressive technical and organisational improvement
  - Evaluate possible legal derogations
  - Evaluate options for public funding