

# PREPARATORY ACTION

## EU plant and animal genetic resources in agriculture

### Compendium of projects

#### THE NETHERLANDS

#### Smak peulvruchten

Production of a wide range of dry beans: gray peas, lemon beans, brown beans, curds and chickpeas.



The publication is part of the study "Preparatory action on EU plant and animal genetic resources in agriculture". The Preparatory Action has been initiated by the European Parliament and financed by the European Commission.

The objectives of the Preparatory action are to better understand the stakes of European neglected genetic resources in agriculture and to tap onto their economic potential.

It aims to provide inspiring examples of how to make the conservation of neglected breeds and varieties economically viable and encourage farmers and other stakeholders to engage.

Funded by the European Union



#### Legal notice

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## 1 Introduction



The Smak family is a concept in North Holland and far beyond. For 4 generations, this family has grown a wide range of dry beans.

The beans of the Smak family are unique in taste. From mid-August, they are harvested and dried and the barn is transformed into a shop-by-house.

Jaap, Marry and Erik Smak also supply wholesale and restaurants throughout the Netherlands; quirky chefs with a love for regional ingredients know the taste of Smak.

**This project demonstrates that individual farmers can develop their own activities of valorisation of genetic resources based on enthusiasm and motivation.**

## 2 Description of the genetic resource

The Smak family is growing a wide range of dry beans, almost the last of the Mohicans. No beans, or beans, but dry beans: gray peas, lemon beans, brown beans, curds and chickpeas!

### *Producten*



witte bonen



bruine bonen



citroenbonen



kievitsbonen



woudbonen



schokkers



grauwe erwten

In the old days, the cultivation of dry beans and peas was a laborious job, as all activities had to be done by hand. In the case of dry beans, this meant sowing, weeding and also harvesting on your knees, picking plants, placing them in rows (waaltje) on the land for one to two days and subsequently putting them on wooden tripods for drying. This explained why farmers decided not to grow these crops any longer and to move to more profitable crops. Today with the use of machinery the cultivation process became more efficient.

### 3 Objectives of the project

The objective of the Smak family is to grow various populations of dry peas in order to benefit from bean diversity. The family still grow onions for seed production and flower bulbs (tulips), but their main focus is on dry beans and peas, what makes the Smak family one of the last farmers in the Netherlands with a focus on these products.

These populations taste much better than the so-called kapucijners (dun peas, brown marrowfat peas). Then Citroenboon (a yellow bean) is the family's favourite dry bean, closely followed by the white krombek.

These varieties allow preparing a typical Dutch recipe called snert.

As seed of these populations and varieties are not sold by commercial seed traders, the Smak family multiplies its own seed on the farm.

### 4 Actors involved and roles

This is a small project that involves a single family. It makes this project unique and it demonstrates that valorisation of old crop varieties can be initiated and managed at individual farm level.

This example clearly demonstrates that, with enthusiasm, conservation and valorisation of neglected crops, can be take place in a sustainable manner at individual farm level with low investments.



### 5 Steps and activities undertaken



The climate in North Holland is very good for growing pulses. It is mild and not too hot, which keeps the product tender during maturing. If the year is good for beans, it is less favourable for peas and vice versa. This gives stability to the production.

Nowadays, agricultural machines are used for sowing and harvesting both crops, which makes the cultivation much more efficient. Compared to the past, the process of harvesting is less laborious;

however, the harvested plants still need to be placed by hand on wooden frames. Furthermore, the grains are sorted by hand (in Dutch this step is called bonen lezen). Friends and family always help the Smak family during summer and autumn.



The Smak family currently sows the peas mostly in March/April, however even February is possible if the weather conditions are good. Dry beans are not sown until May 15, after the Ice Saints' Days. Experience showed that peas grow the best crop when the weather is less favourable during early plant development (een erwt moet strijden: a pea has to struggle), whereas dry beans need to have favourable weather conditions during early plant growth for a good harvest.



As nowadays there is no big industry for cultivating dry beans and peas in the Netherlands, the Smak family has to rely on their own seed production. They need to select all the different types of dry beans (kievitsboon, woudboon and the dry bean varieties typical for North Holland citroenboon and witte krombek) and peas (grauwe erwt and schokkers) they want to grow. According to the Smak family, dry beans and peas from breeding companies do not show equally good results as their own selected material, as they suffer more often from diseases and pests.

## 6 Results to date



According to the Smak family, there are many customers who buy their beans and peas. Most of them come directly to the farm shop, but the family also ships their products to customers from other areas.

For the family, their main satisfaction is based on the fact that their customers keep coming back to the farm shop, which makes them feel very proud of their products.

Last year, pulses appeared in the Dutch dietary guidelines. This further helped increasing the volumes of sales.

## 7 Next steps

The Smak family doesn't intend to further increase its business significantly. It is already at a sustainable level. The family wants to remain local and at a small scale.

## 8 Lesson learned and good practices

This project demonstrates the possibility to develop commercial activities with neglected genetic resources at farm level. The project involves a family who has decided not to further develop its own activities by associating new farmers or new partners in their project.

The main consequence of this choice has been the slow development of activities. However this was the Smak Family approach.

Long-term commitments are needed as significant results are not observed immediately. It takes several years !

This project has been viable from its inception as there was no need for important financial investments for its implementation. Objectives should be proportionated to the investments to the project.



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