

Fascination of Plants Day: Celebrating the vital role of legumes in Europe's past and future

On 18 May, the global scientific community marks the *Fascination of Plants Day*, an initiative highlighting the essential role of plants in our lives, from food and feed to environmental sustainability and innovation.

EU-funded sister projects [Legume Generation](#) and [BELIS](#) take this opportunity to celebrate legumes: a diverse group of crops that have shaped European agriculture and diets for centuries and remain key to building a more sustainable future.



Legumes such as lentils and faba beans have long been part of European farming systems. As exploration and trade expanded, new species like common bean from America and soybean from Asia were introduced, enriching both agriculture and nutrition across the continent.



As noted by **Legume Generation Coordinator Lars-Gernot Otto** and **Science Coordinator Donal Murphy-Bokern**, *“these new legumes were introduced, adapted to European environmental conditions and needs, and enriched the diet of the European population together with the ‘old’ legume crops.”*

Beyond their nutritional value, legumes have historically played a crucial role in improving farming systems.

BELIS Project Coordinator Bernadette

Julier highlights that *“the progress in agricultural production between the 16th and 19th century in Europe is linked to the introduction of legumes in crop rotations.”* Their ability to fix nitrogen naturally helped restore soil fertility, while providing valuable forage for livestock, reducing the need for fallow land and supporting more productive farming systems¹.



This dual benefit — enhancing soils while producing food and feed — remains just as relevant today. However, as Legume Generation coordinators emphasise, maintaining legume cultivation requires continuous effort: *“despite the benefits of legumes for human diet and for agriculture, constant efforts are necessary to keep legume cultivation agronomically competitive.”*

Projects such as Legume Generation and BELIS are working to address this challenge by advancing breeding, improving crop performance, and supporting the wider adoption of legumes in European agriculture.

On this Fascination of Plants Day, we celebrate not only the remarkable biology of plants, but also the enduring contribution of legumes to Europe’s food systems.

¹ [Comment généraliser l’agroécologie ?](#)