

(English version)

**Question for written answer E-000137/25
to the Commission
André Rougé (Pfe)
(15 January 2025)**

Subject: Support for La Réunion sugarcane industry as sugarcane smut spreads

La Réunion's sugarcane industry is undergoing a severe crisis, with record levels of underproduction. In 2024, production was less than 1.3 million tonnes, and this has been exacerbated by the ban on the sale of the R589 variety, which has been affected by sugarcane smut in recent weeks. Even though the decision was made for health reasons, it is causing serious problems for La Réunion's sugarcane growers, who have already had to deal with poor harvests and the consequences of a long-running labour dispute.

While eRcane, a local research institute, points out that R589 had demonstrated good resistance to sugarcane smut when it was first planted, the extreme weather conditions (particularly the drought in 2024) appear to have led to outbreaks that show how vulnerable the industry is to the vagaries of the climate.

The sugarcane industry, one of the cornerstones of La Réunion's economy, is counting on an emergency plan to save it.

In light of this, what measures does the Commission intend to take to financially support La Réunion sugarcane growers who are tackling sugarcane smut, as well as to stimulate the development of varieties that are more resistant to diseases and adapted to the extreme weather conditions of our tropical regions?

Submitted: 15.1.2025

**Answer given by Mr Várhelyi on behalf of the European Commission
(25 March 2025)**

The European Agricultural Funds may support sugarcane growers in La Réunion.

Agriculture in the outermost regions is supported by the Programme of Specific Options on Remoteness and Insularity (POSEI), and exceptional changes to the programme are possible to deal with natural disasters.

Under the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), under certain conditions, support can be provided to restore agricultural production potential damaged by natural disasters (including pest diseases).

Support is also available for cooperation measures such as pilot projects and developing new products, practices, processes and techniques.

In addition, a new exceptional EAFRD measure under the Rural Development Programme allows Member States to provide liquidity support to farmers affected by natural disasters.

The Commission's proposal on plants obtained by certain new genomic techniques⁽¹⁾ contributes to sustainability and resilience of the agri-food system, in particular to foster the development of improved plant varieties that are climate resilient and pest resistant.

Plant health research and innovation are prioritised through Horizon Europe⁽²⁾, particularly under cluster 6: 'Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment'⁽³⁾, and will remain a key focus in future Horizon Europe Work Programmes⁽⁴⁾.

Numerous EU-funded projects address emerging plant pest threats⁽⁵⁾ by developing advanced tools for early detection, prevention, monitoring and management. They also focus on breeding resistant or tolerant varieties adapted to climate change⁽⁶⁾.

⁽¹⁾ COM(2023) 411 final.

⁽²⁾ https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe_en

⁽³⁾ https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe/cluster-6-food-bioeconomy-natural-resources-agriculture-and-environment_en

⁽⁴⁾ Horizon Europe Strategic Plan 2025-2027 https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe/strategic-plan_en

⁽⁵⁾ Agri Factsheet Plant Health https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/document/e8a5772e-9fca-4583-a81b-649729068f1e_en

⁽⁶⁾ Agri Factsheet Breeding and Genetic Resources https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/document/download/158ab06d-46a7-4803-bef8-ae6582bfcfe1_en