

# BERRIES WG REPORT (2024–2025)

In preparation for the 18th Steering Committee Meeting, Tbilisi, Georgia, 2-4 June 2026

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## 1. CONTRIBUTION TO ECPGR OBJECTIVES

### 1.1. Achievements and success stories

- To efficiently conserve and provide access to unique germplasm in Europe through AEGIS and the European Collection

The title of the first project of the WG, submitted under the 4th Call for Proposals of the ECPGR Activity Grant Scheme (Phase X), was 'Collaborative action for updating the documenting about berry genetic resources in Europe'. With the implementation of the project, the varieties/ cultivars of the berry genetic resources were recorded in the respective countries. The data were harmonized and qualitatively evaluated. Altogether, 4,061 accessions of berry genetic resources were mentioned in the inventories.

Furthermore, the first draft of the crop-specific technical guidelines for genebank management of berry genetic resources was elaborated as the basis for establishing quality standards of conservation for unique berry germplasm in the European Collection. The document was discussed step-by-step during the 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting in Kaunas, Lithuania, in June 2025; a final version was agreed upon, and it was subsequently published on the AEGIS website.

For the genera of berries with the most accessions (*Fragaria*, *Rubus* and *Ribes*), cultivars were selected to form the basis of further projects. The aim is to start further projects on characterization (phenotypic/ molecular) in order to identify unique accessions for inclusion in AEGIS in the future.

These candidate accessions chosen in the EUROPE.BERRIES project identified overlapping cultivars across genebanks that will be used for piloting in the following project.

- To provide passport and phenotypic information of actively conserved European PGRFA diversity *ex situ* and *in situ* through the EURISCO catalogue

The created inventories of accessions of varieties/cultivars of berry genetic resources in a qualitative uniform manner provide information about berry germplasm actively conserved *ex situ* in the participating European countries and were finally documented through the EURISCO catalogue.

A new project proposal was written for the Third Call – Phase XI (2024–2028) with the title 'Collaborative action for developing trait descriptors for berry genetic resources in Europe' (BerryTraits). This proposal was supported by WG members from 16 countries.

- To improve in situ conservation and use of crop wild relatives  
n/a
- To promote on-farm conservation and management of European PGRFA diversity  
n/a
- To promote use of PGRFA  
n/a

## 1.2. Gaps or constraints identified

The identification of unique and true-to-type accessions is the next important challenge for berry germplasm collections. For confirmation of true-to-type accessions of old and traditional berry varieties, pomological characteristics will have a key role. The elaboration of passport descriptor lists and characterization protocols to improve standardization with primary and secondary descriptors will be the basis for the work.

## 2. GRANT SCHEME ACTIVITIES, WG MEETINGS AND EVA ACTIVITIES

- **Grant Scheme proposals (submitted:0; approved:0)**
- **Meetings held**
  - 2nd Meeting of the Berries Working Group, 17-19 June 2025, Kaunas, Lithuania
  - EVA Perennials, Workshop of the EVA Boost project towards establishing an EVA Perennials network, Ancona, Italy, 13-14 March 2025
- **Total number of partners involved in WG Meeting: 19 from 13 countries**
  - ECPGR-funded: 16 from 13 countries
  - Self-funded: 3 from 3 countries
- **Reports and related data**
  - [Report](#) of the 2nd Meeting of the Berries Working Group, 17-19 June 2025, Kaunas, Lithuania
  - [EVA Perennials/EVA Boost workshop report](#), Ancona, Italy, 13-14 March 2025
  - [Roadmap for the Development and Establishment of the EVA Perennials Network](#)
- **Funds mobilized: € 15,000 (2<sup>nd</sup> WG meeting)**

## 3. OTHER ACTIVITIES (CROSS-WORKING GROUP ACTIVITIES, LINKS WITH OTHER NETWORKS, PROJECTS AND INITIATIVES)

- **Cross-Working Group activities:** The WG is a partner in the EVA network. Bruno Mezzetti, as a WG member, organized the European Evaluation Network (EVA) Boost Perennials kick-off meeting that took place in Ancona, Italy, on 13-14 March 2025. The

meeting represented a key milestone in strengthening European collaboration on the evaluation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources for berries and fruit trees.

- **Others:**

Development of berry germplasm ‘BERRIES,’ 2024-2026, led by Dag Røen and funded by The Nordic Public-Private Partnership for Pre-Breeding in Plants (Nordic PPP). This project aims to develop genetically and phenotypically well-defined strawberry and raspberry germplasm to significantly widen the gene pool available for Nordic and Baltic breeding programmes. This project includes WG members from Norway, Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Denmark, and the curator of the Swedish national *Rubus* collection, in a joint effort to characterize and evaluate the *Rubus* accessions.

Some members of the working group were actively involved in the final processing of the EU project ‘Breeding value’, which was completed on 31 August 2025. The project was coordinated by Bruno Mezzetti.

#### **4. WORKING GROUP DOCUMENTS AND PUBLICATIONS**

- [Berries Crop-specific Genebank Standards](#)
- Prochnow, L., Sánchez-Sevilla, J.F., Dubbini, M. et al. Regulatory landscape for plant genetic resources: germplasm conservation and plant variety rights in the berry sector in Europe. *Genet Resour Crop Evol* 72, 10111–10137 (2025). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10722-025-02553-2>

#### **5. EXPECTED ADDITIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS AND FUTURE ACTIVITIES**

The aim is to start further projects and activities on characterization (phenotypic/molecular) in order to identify unique accessions for inclusion in AEGIS in the future. The ECPGR WGs of other clonally propagated crops (*Pyrus/Malus*, *Prunus*, *Vitis*, *Allium*) have recently addressed these difficulties of true-to-typeness confirmation and preservation of representative diversity by developing harmonized descriptors and DNA-based true-to-typeness tests. Both steps will be necessary for developing the European genetic resource management of berries, too.