



CROP WILD RELATIVES WORKING GROUP REPORT 2024–2025

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Major achievements and outcomes

- ECPGR CWR WG saw **fruit of long-term lobbying of the EU** and helped obtain **€15M funding for CWR conservation and use in Europe**. Helped prepare the Call text for EU in 2024.
- Three projects with a budget of **≈5M euro** funding each were selected for funding
 - **COUSIN** (Christian Schöb, University Rey Juan Carlos, Madrid, Spain): five-year project focuses on wheat, barley, pea, lettuce and brassicas with a consortium of 26 partners (<https://cousinproject.eu/>)
 - **FRUITDIV** (Véronique Decroocq, INRAE, Villenave d'Ornon, France): four-year project focusing on *Malus*, *Pyrus* and *Prunus* species with 26 partners from 14 countries (www.fruitdiv.eu).
 - **PRO-WILD** (Jacques Le-Gouis, INRAE Clermont-Ferrand, France): five-year project focuses on wheat, sugar beet, and oilseed rape with 18 institutions from 11 countries (www.pro-wild.eu).
- The project 'Extension of **EURISCO for Crop Wild Relatives (CWR) *in situ* data** and preparation of pilot countries' data sets, coordinated by ECPGR and funded by German Min. Food and Agriculture (2021-2025) with ECPGR Doc. and Info WG and EURISCO Advisory Committee.
- There is a growing evidence-base concerning CWR diversity, conservation and use with **over half of European countries now with CWR checklists and inventories**.
- In Europe, Germany was the first country to have **officially designated genetic reserves** for selected wild *Apium* CWR and the UK first with multi-crop genepool genetic reserve on the Lizard in Cornwall.

Funded projects overview

- **COUSIN** (Christian Schöb, €5M): is a five-year project CWR use and conservation of **wheat, barley, pea, lettuce and brassicas** —26 partners More information can be found at <https://cousinproject.eu/>
- **FRUITDIV** (Véronique Decroocq, €5M): is five project addressing the conservation, characterisation and use of fruit tree CWR with a focus on **Malus, Pyrus and Prunus species**. The project integrates *ex situ* inventories, *in situ* population sampling, phenotyping and downstream genetic analyses to support conservation planning and pre-breeding. By 2025, More information can be found at www.fruitdiv.eu
- **PRO-WILD** (Jacques Le-Gouis, €5M): focuses on **wheat, sugar beet, and oilseed rape**. Five years, with 18 institutions from 11 countries. It addresses: (1) *in situ* conservation: mapping, characterizing and protecting areas where CWR occur; (2) *ex situ* conservation: propagating, conserving, and cataloguing CWR outside their natural environments to safeguard their genetic material, and (3) pre-breeding activities: identifying desirable traits in CWR and incorporating these traits into elite breeding programs to enhance the genetic diversity and resilience of cultivated crops. More information can be found at www.pro-wild.eu
- **Extension of EURISCO for Crop Wild Relatives (CWR) *in situ* data and preparation of pilot countries' data sets** (ECPGR €317,316), coordinated by ECPGR Secretariat and funded by the German Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (2021-2025). The **extension of EURISCO to *in situ* data created a link with the existing *ex situ* data and thus improved the *ex situ* / *in situ* conservation interface**. The implementation of this project helped achieve international commitments defined by the CBD, GPA and ITPGRFA, as well as by the Plant Genetic Resources Strategy for Europe, and made a significant step forward in expanding the range of conserved CWR resources available to users. More information can be found at <https://www.ecpgr.org/working-groups/crop-wild-relatives/cwr-in-eurisco> .

Key learnings and challenges

- **European CWR Networking:** formal recognition of a **European CWR *in situ* network** has yet to be discussed, although planning for such an initiative is in place. First integrated CWR *in situ* network in Europe will be those established **at national level discussed and planned in Germany, Nordic Reg. Spain and the UK**. Need national and European CWR / WFP networks
- **Taxonomic versus floristic based conservation:** two approaches to CWR conservation,
 - **taxonomic** approach involves conservation actions for **all known or a subset of known CWR taxa**,
 - **floristic** approach involves conservation for **all known in a multinational region** (e.g., Europe).
 - Latter avoids unnecessary duplication of effort of **multiple such projects at different times that do not entirely match-up results and discarding of historic partial initiatives that only address part of the topic**. Formal establishment of a **European CWR *in situ* network** required
- **Balance between CWR conservation and use:** It is universally accepted by those working on PGR conservation that **conservation of the resource should always be linked to the resources utilisation**. However, it is less clear whether all appreciate that the most efficient and effective use of PGR is predicated on access to the maximum breadth of resource diversity; to use the resource it must be conserved. The **balance between CWR conservation and use need correcting to ensure maximum breadth of resource diversity**.
- **Balance between CWR *ex situ* and *in situ* conservation:** Since the 80s it has also been universally accepted by those working on PGR, as well as biodiversity, conservation should be complementary; conservation involving the **complementary application of *ex situ* and *in situ* techniques**. Still not fully integrated, complementary technique application.
- **CWR and WFP conservation and use:** Recently **FAO has link CWR and WFP conservation** and use because both CWR and WFP taxa are wild undomesticated taxa consumed as human food, but there are significant differences between the conservation and use of CWR and WFP diversity, but currently **WFP conservation and use is completely ignored** and the ECPGR CWR need addressing.

PGRSE Target 2030 Status

PGRSE Target	Status
1. All countries in Europe have included CWR and WFP conservation in national PGR programmes and actions.	Partially achieved: for CWR, but not achieved for WFP
2. All countries in Europe have identified CWR priority taxa and populations– including those in protected areas - forming the basis of their national and a European <i>in situ</i> network of CWR.	Partially achieved: the majority of European countries now have CWR checklist and inventories
3. Europe has a coherent, comprehensive, coordinated and centralized documentation of CWR and WFP <i>in situ</i> diversity.	Not achieved: for either CWR or WFP, some steps towards EURSCO CWR passport inclusion
4. CWR priority populations within the European network of CWR are managed and monitored following agreed guidelines for the <i>in situ</i> management of CWR populations.	Not achieved: formally recognised European CWR Network not discuss but national CWR <i>in situ</i> networks are being planned in the UK
5. <i>In situ</i> conserved CWR populations are safely backed-up in <i>ex situ</i> collections and made available to users.	Partially achieved: small proportion of <i>in situ</i> pops. are backed-up in a designated <i>ex situ</i> GRC
6. A wider use of pre-breeding of CWR and participatory-breeding on landraces on-farm generates added value to the unique diversity of these materials	Not achieved: It remains the case that CWR are poorly represented in European <i>ex situ</i> collections that are the prime route for users supply
7. EURISCO contains high-quality passport data of all European <i>ex situ</i> collections, progressively extended to include actively-managed <i>in situ</i> CWR populations and appropriate on-farm landraces data.	Partially achieved: Test <i>in situ</i> passport datasets have been uploaded to EURISCO but this data only represents a small sample compared to what exists in nature is currently unconserved.

Future priorities and ideas

Target to be completed by 2030:

1. All countries in Europe have included **systematic CWR and WFP conservation in national PGR programmes and actions**.
2. All countries in Europe have identified **CWR priority taxa and populations**– inside in protected areas and OECM - forming the basis of their national and a European *in situ* network of CWR.
3. Europe has a coherent, comprehensive, coordinated and centralized **documentation of CWR and WFP *in situ* and *ex situ* diversity**.
4. CWR priority populations within the **European network of CWR are managed and monitored** following agreed guidelines for the *in situ* management of CWR populations.
5. *In situ* conserved CWR populations are **safely backed-up in *ex situ* collections and made available** to users.
6. EURISCO contains **high-quality passport data of all European *ex situ* collections**, progressively extended to include **actively-managed *in situ* CWR populations**.
7. A wider **use of pre-breeding of CWR, C+E, and pre-breeding generates added value** to the unique diversity of these materials

Ideas to aid Target completion: EU grant application to complete CWR Targets

- **European Research Council** supports novel research in any area. Grants are awarded to a single PI for a duration of up to 5 years. PIs must demonstrate the ground-breaking nature, ambition, and feasibility of their scientific proposal. ERC Advanced grant for already established research leaders with a recognised track-record of research achievements providing **up to €2.5m**: Deadline 27 August 2026: <https://erc.europa.eu/funding/advanced-grants>