



Press Release

ROTATES Moves Into the Field: New Trials Across Europe Advance Minor Root and Tuber Crops

After one year, the Horizon Europe project is testing agroecological farming systems, healthy planting material and new value chains while expanding field activities across Europe and Africa.

Brussels, July 1st, 2026 – New field trials, healthier planting material, agroecological cropping systems, new food and feed processing approaches and stronger collaboration between farmers, researchers and industry. These are among the first results delivered by the Horizon Europe project ROTATES (Minor ROot and Tuber crops fostering AgrobiodiversiTy and Ecosystem Services) as it completes its first year of activities.

Over the past twelve months, the consortium has moved from project preparation to implementation, launching research and innovation activities across six pilot Living Labs, four Breeding Hubs, new food and feed processing approaches and a series of value chain Case Studies dedicated to unlocking the potential of Minor Root and Tuber (MRT) crops for more resilient farming and food systems. These achievements were reviewed during the project's General Assembly, held 17-19 June in Madeira, Portugal, where partners met to assess progress, exchange experiences and prepare the next phase of the project.

The first year has focused on building the foundations needed to support the adoption of MRT crops across different agricultural contexts. The consortium published its preliminary Data Management Plan, developed a methodological framework grounded in the Living Lab methodology, with the Multi Actor Approach as one of its core engagement dimensions and completed the first diagnosis of MRT value chains across the countries involved in the project. Together, these outputs provide a common framework for stakeholder engagement, co-creation and future research activities.

Research is now underway in the field and in the Laboratory Across Europe, farmers are already testing new agroecological practices together with researchers, advisors and value chain actors. The pilot Living Labs and Breeding Hubs are operating in real farming conditions, where new cropping systems, healthy planting material and collaborative approaches are being developed and evaluated. Rather than testing solutions in isolation, ROTATES brings together the actors who will ultimately grow, process, market and use MRT crops.

This collaborative approach is already taking different forms across the project. In France, partners are working to strengthen an emerging sweet potato sector through farmer training, co-creation activities and closer coordination across the value chain. In Portugal, Living Labs and Breeding Hubs are evaluating sweet potato varieties, developing healthier planting material and testing agroecological practices such as crop rotations and intercropping.

In Madeira and Cyprus, experimental cropping systems based on taro are being assessed to improve water use efficiency, strengthen ecosystem services and increase the resilience of irrigated agriculture.

Beyond Europe, ROTATES is also contributing to the conservation of agricultural biodiversity. In French Guiana, researchers and farmers are working together to preserve cassava genetic diversity threatened by emerging diseases while establishing new germplasm collections for future breeding activities. In the Republic of the Congo and French Guiana, agroecological experiments are exploring cassava-based production systems that improve soil fertility, reduce weed pressure and contribute to zero-deforestation farming systems.

The project has also started developing and testing sanitation protocols to obtain virus-free planting material for MRT crops, an essential step towards more reliable seed systems and long-term crop performance. It has also started identifying the varieties that will be used to develop new healthy food products and will be incorporated in feed products. Alongside these activities, the consortium has delivered its first scientific publications and technical reports, contributing new knowledge on crop genetics, value chains, stakeholder engagement and innovation processes for underutilised crops.

As ROTATES enters its second year, activities across the pilot Living Labs, Breeding Hubs and Case Studies will continue to expand. New field experiments, food and feed applications, breeding activities and stakeholder engagement actions will build on the work already underway, bringing research closer to farmers, markets and consumers. By connecting crop diversity, agroecological practices and innovation across the value chain, the project aims to demonstrate how Minor Root and Tuber crops can contribute to more resilient farming systems and a more diversified European food system.

About ROTATES

ROTATES (Minor ROot and Tuber crops fostering AgrobiodiversiTy and Ecosystem Services) is a Horizon Europe-funded Research and Innovation Action coordinated by CIRAD. Running from July 2025 to June 2029, the project brings together 18 partners from Europe and Africa to promote the adoption of Minor Root and Tuber crops (MRTs), including sweet potato, cassava, yam and taro, through agroecological practices, breeding activities, stakeholder engagement and innovation across food and feed value chains.

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