

VEGEPOLYS: an example of international competitive cluster which promotes plant innovation through industry and research collaboration

Noelle Dorion

^a *Vegepolys france*

* *international@vegepolys.eu*

In France since 2005, 71 structures have been labelled "Pôles de compétitivité" (French competitive clusters) by the French state, in various sectors. A "Pôle de compétitivité" is in a given area, an association of companies, research centres and training organisations committed to a partnership approach in order to create synergies within jointly-run innovative projects. As the main aim of a French cluster is to give its seal of approval to innovating projects between research and companies so that these projects can get specific funds from the French State, the Government and regional authorities allocate a special budget for this policy of clusters. There are 17 international clusters including VEGEPOLYS, which has been recognized by the French state as the international plant cluster.

Located in the Loire Valley in France, VEGEPOLYS is thus based on a unique concentration of leading companies, research institutes and training centers for the **production of eco-friendly and health friendly plants** having a more favourable impact on biodiversity, health and the environment. It operates in the following branches: ornamental horticulture, fruit and vegetable growing, seeds, aromatic and medicinal plants, mushrooms, cider, tobacco.

VEGEPOLYS supports common projects around **4 main technological key themes**: plant breeding, plants and seed health, health and well-being properties of plants, as well as landscape and urban horticulture.

Moreover, our cluster is a **network** that facilitates:

Innovation: VEGEPOLYS helps the emergence of collaborative projects and gives a technical support to the latter, from the setting up to the label process and execution. This has been the case for example for 2 projects in which plant biotechnologies have been used. The first project, named 'BRIO' (Breeding Research and Innovation on Ornamentals), aims at developing the best strategy of plant breeding according to species and expected objectives. The second, 'Rosa Fortissima', uses molecular markers, for instance, to identify genes in rosebushes that are resilient to specific pathogens, in order to avoid any risks linked to the use of pesticides.

Competitiveness and working in networks: to create added value for companies.

International development: VEGEPOLYS is internationally oriented: it establishes partnerships through the world and opens its membership to foreign members.

Business intelligence: to have a better view of the technological, marketing changes and to meet social demands.

As a result, since it has been labelled in 2005, VEGEPOLYS represents over 300 members, a hundred labelled projects, over 50 million € in investment, over 25 million € in funds, 100 arrivals of new researchers, and national and international partnerships.