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Ongoing strategic action plan of France to develop domestic sustainable and high-quality soy production and uses

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Global soybean production situation is changing in European Union due to growing market demand for local, GM-free and durable soybean sources, for both soy food and animal feeding (about 12-15% of total consumed soymeal is GM-free) and more favourable European agricultural policy and soybean prices. So as to meet the French feed and food industry requirements for a GMO-free, Identity preserved, sustainable soybean supply (equivalent to 250 000 ha of soybean), the Interbranch oilseed and protein crops organisation (Terres Univia) is implementing a strategic plan based on regional scaled agro-industrial development.

Different actions are coordinated and supported by the Interbranch organisation including R&D supports (breeding,), normative actions, quality seeds survey and establishment of a common certification scheme aiming at offering to the market certified soybeans and soy products (meal, oil, soy foods.). The certification scheme is based on four major commitments: GM-free quality, identity-preserved guaranty, local sourcing and a set of sustainability criteria.

First results are encouraging. Soybean acreage increased from 43 000 ha in 2013 to 137 000 ha in 2016. Organic farming soybean surfaces also have doubled, reaching between 15 and 20 %. French soybean harvest showed a good quality (between 40.7% and 42.5% protein content on dry matter basis). The new medium scale crushing plants are based on hexane-free technology, allowing to deliver a high quality meal to animal sector in addition to extruded products. All soy food products processed in France are now based on local and under contract supply.

For the forthcoming years, French soybean actors will rise to major challenges which are i) to undertake at large scale the new certification scheme ii) to continue improving the competitiveness of the French soybean value chains.