EUROPEAN CONFEDERATION OF MAIZE PRODUCTION
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PRESS RELEASE

HOW MAIZE WILL SAVE THE WORLD

A CONFERENCE-DEBATE WITH SYLVIE BRUNEL
AT THE MILAN UNIVERSAL EXHIBITION ON 7 SEPTEMBER 2015

Organised by the European Confederation of Maize Production (CEPM) in the European Union Pavilion, this conference-debate brought together many stakeholders in European agriculture.
With the Milan Universal Exhibition being focussed on the theme "Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life", CEPM was aware that the title it chose for its conference - "How Maize Will Save the World" - was a little provocative, given the popular belief that maize is too water- and chemicals-intensive, that it symbolises "big" farmers, intensive industry and international trade.

The advocate selected to make the case for maize was geographer, writer and Sorbonne Professor Sylvie Brunel. Author of "A loving geography of maize", she has very strong convictions on the topic: she introduced maize as "the plant of the Gods", transforming the "maize problem" into a "maize solution" for Europe and for the rest of the world.
Professor Brunel began with a quick reminder of the history of maize, which first appeared 7,000 years ago in Mexico. As the centuries progressed it conquered the planet – most recently Africa – eventually becoming the leading globally-produced cereal, with nearly 50% of world cereal production. However, despite producing a billion tonnes per year, maize is still considered by the FAO to be a secondary cereal. This is just another reason why maize is misunderstood.

Grown everywhere, maize can be used for everything: food and feed, renewable energy and biochemistry. It is a generous plant. In addition to these still misunderstood aspects, Professor Brunel tackled the environmental criticisms of maize. Maize is, in her view, a carbon well, a source of both oxygen and biodiversity. A hectare of maize produces twice as much oxygen as a hectare of forest. Contrary to popular belief, maize uses less plant health products and water than other cereals or crops.

On the topic of irrigation – the target of frequent criticism, both founded and unfounded – Professor Brunel went on the offensive, singling out irrigation and seed breeding as two factors that could be used to improve the efficiency of maize production. While an efficient and optimal use of water resources is required, we should not exclude biotechnologies such as GMOs, which are often rejected as well.

The future has many interesting developments in store for maize, particularly in terms of production and yields. Far from being the product of financial schemes, maize is in fact the best anti-hunger cereal as it provides poor people with food that is easy, quick to grow and produces high yields.

Will maize save the world? With such strong technical, economic, nutritional, energy and environmental assets, maize clearly has a rosy future all over the world.

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