

Business Planning Roadmap for Organic Seed Producers & Plant Breeders



LiveSeeding



SWOT ANALYSIS



BIRD VIEW



BUSINESS CANVAS



BUSINESS
PLAN



Business Planning Roadmap for Organic Seed Producers & Plant Breeders

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Introduction

You grow organic seeds. You breed organic varieties and populations. You believe in organic agriculture, preserving cultivated diversity and delivering seeds for professional farming.

Running a financially sustainable business in the organic breeding and seed sector that combines respect for seeds as a common good and delivery of quality plant reproductive material as a key farming input is more difficult than it should be. The LiveSeeding innovation action supports organic seed producers and plant breeders, with an analysis of market opportunities and constraints specific to the organic sector to help entrepreneurs grow and expand their businesses.

Whether you are just starting or looking to expand, you need:

- 🌱 Analytical tools to understand your business and how it interacts with the organic seed market peculiarities
- 🌱 Business planning frameworks adapted to the organic seed sector
- 🌱 Financial planning tools to make better investment decisions
- 🌱 An understanding of funding mechanisms, their relationship with the governance structure of your initiative and how to access financing fitting your needs
- 🌱 To exchange knowledge and experiences with other organic seed and breeding entrepreneurs across Europe

This booklet is a practical resource for organic seed producers and plant breeders who need to manage their finances, plan their businesses effectively and frame their activity in the market and funding landscape at the European level.

To thrive in the organic seed and breeding sector, be economically successful and in line with organic farming principles, you need a clear business strategy, an understanding of your costs and revenues, the ability to adapt to a constantly changing market and the opportunity to exploit your unique organic advantages for the sustainability of your initiative.

What you will find in this booklet

- 🌱 From challenges to opportunities – SWOT and Bird View
- 🌱 Turning a business idea into a clear action plan – Business Model Canvas
- 🌱 Business planning is a must-have – Business plan
- 🌱 Funding your breeding programme – Funding sources

The organic seed and breeding sector in Europe is growing. Demand for locally adapted, high-quality organic seeds is on the rise, driven by growing consumer awareness, increasingly challenging climate conditions, and a strengthening regulatory framework, EU Regulation 2018/848, which sets a 100% organic seed requirement for organic production by 2036. On the other hand, profitability remains an issue for small and medium-sized producers, and access to funding remains at low levels. Opportunities for organic seed entrepreneurs exist but require a strategic approach and a deep understanding of the financial aspects of the business. This booklet is made precisely for that reason: to present tools and results that can support organic seed producers and breeders to strengthen and grow their businesses. By following the roadmap (Figure 1), you can assess your business compared to market needs and trends and design the most adapted strategies to your context and needs.

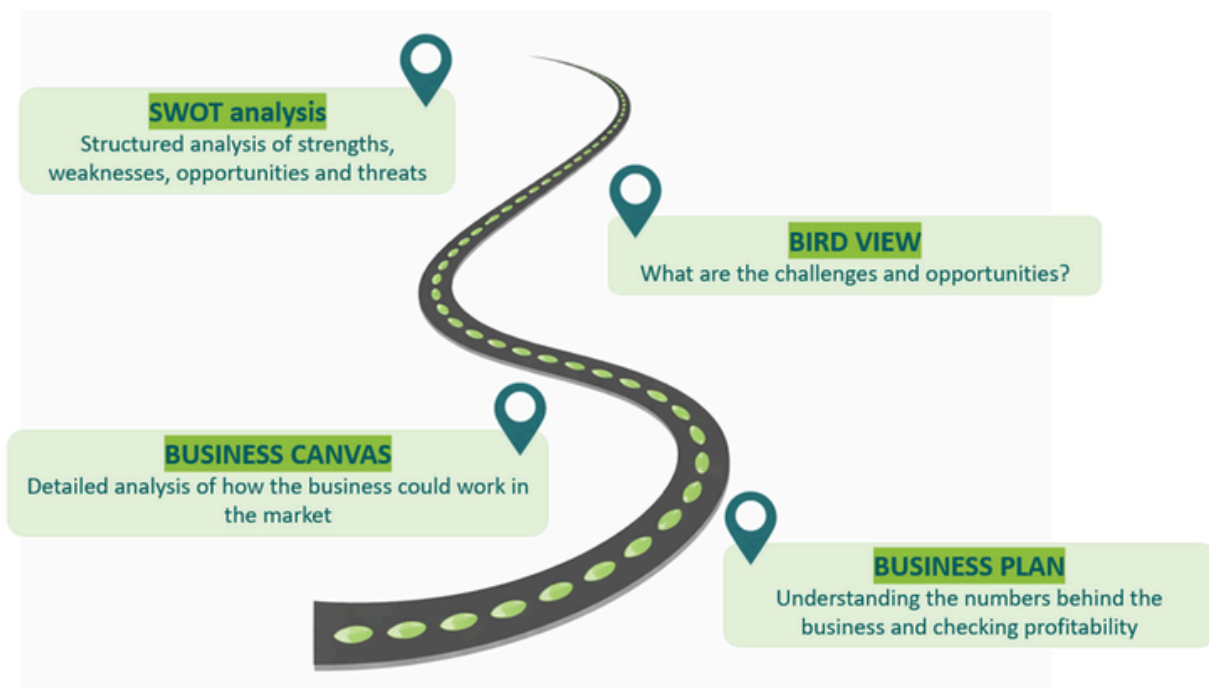


Figure 1: Roadmap to a viable business

Roadmap to organic seed business:

1. **SWOT analysis** provides you with a realistic picture of the business environment by identifying internal strengths and weaknesses, and external opportunities and risks. It helps prioritise strategic actions and anticipate challenges.
2. **The Business Birdview** connects the previous analysis with your strategic direction, in just one page, and it supports clearer positioning and long-term business orientation.
3. **The Business Model Canvas** helps you to clarify how value is created, delivered, and monetised. It structures customer focus, cost logic, and revenue potential, making business assumptions visible and testable.
4. **The Business Plan** provides you with a structured framework for turning strategic ideas into concrete actions. It defines goals, timelines, financial projections, and operational priorities, enabling more predictable business development and investment planning.

Each tool section includes a short explanation of the tool and how to use it, a practical example in a template form and key takeaways and recommendations from the LiveSeeding project.

This roadmap is complemented with an overview of **funding sources** with respective opportunities and limitations.

The challenges you face and why they matter

Before diving into tools and solutions, it helps to name the challenges clearly. Running an organic seed or breeding business in Europe means facing structural challenges that can limit growth and innovation. Identifying challenges is the first step toward developing effective strategies and transforming obstacles into opportunities. According to the exchanges facilitated by LiveSeeding, these are major challenges detected in the sector, regardless of the country (Figure 2).

Fragmented markets

- Small customer base spread across many regions (as an effect of focusing on locally adapted cultivars)
- Difficult to achieve economies of scale (as a result of focusing on niche crops and maximisation of cultivar diversity)
- Organic seed price competition with the conventional seed price

Complex regulations

- EU seed legislation is not always in line with the needs of organic seed initiatives
- Seed certification costs are high for small producers
- Variety registration is expensive

Limited funding

- Too little public funding for breeding
- Private investors unfamiliar with organic seed and breeding niche
- Short funding cycles vs. long breeding timelines

Weak value chain collaboration

- The needs of organic farmers and the objectives of breeders are not always aligned
- Lack of data about the organic seed demand and use
- Missed opportunities for joint organic value chain development with full integration of the seed and breeding aspect

Figure 2: Market challenges

These challenges are significant and require a strategic approach. For this reason, and in order to boost the organic and breeding seed sector, the LiveSeeding project advises a PUSH-PULL-ENABLE approach, which combines generating innovation and new knowledge (push), strengthening market demand and value chain collaboration (pull), and creating supportive policy and business conditions (enable) (Figure 3). This integrated strategy helps improve seed availability, increase sector competitiveness, and support the long-term growth of organic seed and breeding initiatives in Europe.



Figure 3: Illustration of the PUSH-PULL-ENABLE approach used in the LiveSeeding project

Now, let's work on your case and find the strategies that suit you best.

The following sections present practical tools and strategic insights to address risks, strengthen business performance, and unlock growth potential.

From challenges to opportunities - SWOT and Birdview

A SWOT analysis maps Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. The LiveSeeding project applied this tool through structured interviews with organic seed producers and breeders across Europe. As each initiative's specific SWOT analysis is kept for internal use, we developed a summary SWOT analysis of the organic seed sector in Europe (Figure 4).

The LiveSeeding results reveal patterns that affect all actors in the sector. The SWOT emphasises strong sector assets such as partnerships, crop diversity, and innovation potential, rooted in the Organic Agriculture principles. At the same time, it highlights structural gaps in scale, economic sustainability, commercial strategy, and risk management that influence competitiveness.

Strengths (internal)  - Strong focus on Research and Development in Breeding programmes - Compliance with organic standards and certifications - Diversification of product range to meet market demands - Cost efficiency through collaboration with other members of the network	Weaknesses (internal)  - Recruiting and retaining qualified personnel - Dependence on subsidies and external financial assistance - Complex and time-consuming regulatory requirements
Opportunities (external)  - Build collaborations to access new knowledge, innovation, and markets - Invest in digitalisation - Invest new organic cultivar types for market diversification - Invest in services related to agrobiodiversity management to create new revenue streams	Threats (external)  - Economic fluctuations and inflation - Low awareness and lack of consciousness among farmers - Bureaucratic hurdles and paperwork - The complexity and high costs of adhering to organic regulations

Figure 4: Strategic outlook: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the European organic seed sector. These conclusions are based on LiveSeeding Deliverable 5.1, which includes case studies and sector examples (see Further Reading list)

➤ **And now, do your own SWOT analysis.**

Business Birdview: one-page, whole picture

The Business Birdview is an innovative, yet practical strategic tool developed specifically for organic seed and breeding entrepreneurs. It provides a concise overview of business bottlenecks, growth opportunities, and future income logic in a single visual framework. It builds on the SWOT analysis and helps reflect on and integrate elements that will become central when developing the Business Model Canvas. It is organised into three columns:

Challenges of Today ➤ Internal and external bottlenecks that are holding the business back	Sounds Like Opportunity ➤ Growth opportunities, the unique value of the business, and how to reach customers	Future is Organic ➤ Revenue streams, profitability, and strategic recommendations for sustainable growth
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The figure below (Figure 5) shows an example of a template a business could use to complete a Business Birdview and how business information can be organised in a single page by answering concrete questions. This example demonstrates how business analysis can be translated into concrete strategic priorities, including market positioning, diversifying income, and reducing risk.

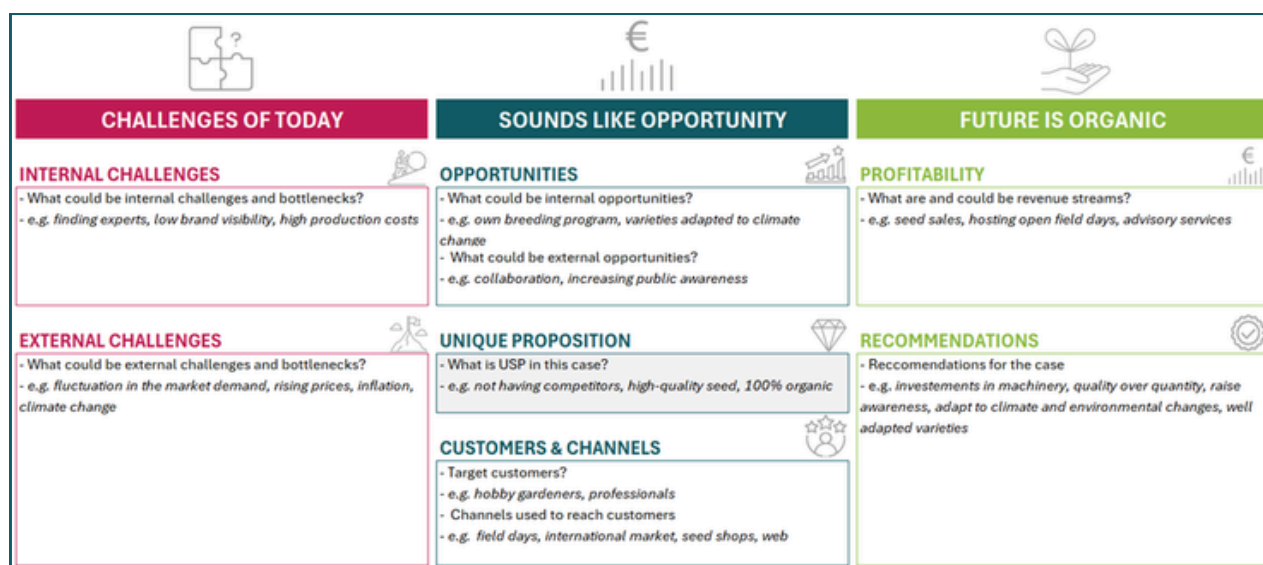


Figure 5: Birdview example

Before developing your Business Birdview, take a moment to review the key factors that influence business development in the organic seed sector and where strategic action can make the biggest difference.

The points below summarise the main lessons identified through the application of the Business Birdview tool (Deliverable 5.1, see Further Reading List). The lessons presented here are based on data collected through interviews conducted with participants within the organic seed sector. They help translate prior analysis into clear priorities for strengthening resilience, improving market position, and supporting long-term sustainable growth.



Key takeaways from Business Birdview

- Organic seed businesses face both internal challenges, such as low visibility, and external pressures like market fluctuations and complex regulations.
- Collaboration and partnerships with farmers, research organisations, and universities can reduce costs, support innovation, and open access to knowledge, resources, and new markets.
- Developing a clear, unique value proposition based on local adaptation, seed health, or organic cultivar type helps businesses stand out and strengthen their market position. Investing in marketing, communication, and customer relationships is essential to increase visibility and sales.
- Training, digital tools, and better internal planning can improve efficiency in seed production, management, and sales, while also helping businesses prepare for risks and adapt to changing market conditions.
- Diversified income streams and funding sources, such as seed sales, advisory services, and training activities, increase financial stability and make long-term investments possible.
- Understanding target customers and exploring new markets through the right sales channels, product diversification, and staying informed about sector trends can improve competitiveness and secure sustainable growth in the coming years.

Turning a business idea into a clear action plan – Business Model Canvas

Contributing to your seed business to increase the cultivated diversity envisioned by the organic farming principles for the benefits of the environment, society, and the profitability of organic farms is not enough. A successful organic seed business needs a **written plan** that covers who your customers are, how you create value, how you make money, and what costs need to be considered.

The Business Model Canvas (BMC) (Figure 6) is the tool that brings this together.

The Business Model Canvas (BMC) structures the core elements of an organic seed and breeding business, including customer segments, value proposition, cost structure, and revenue logic. Adapted to sector realities such as long breeding cycles and certification requirements, it supports clearer business positioning and more realistic planning assumptions. It illustrates how key elements such as problems, solutions, customer segments, costs, and revenue sources can be clearly structured to support business analysis and planning.

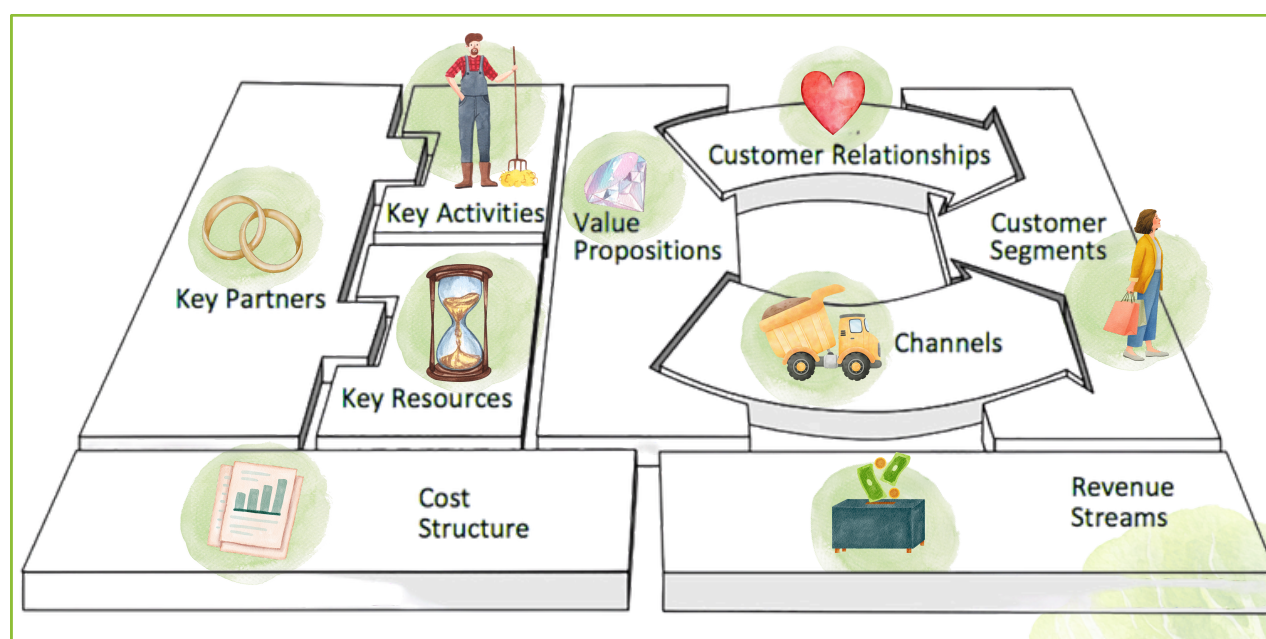


Figure 6: Integrated Business Model Canvas: key components and value creation

Here is a quick guideline on how to fill in the BMC for your case and some **examples per category, adapted for the organic seed and breeding sector.**

PROBLEM	What problems exist in the market? What are the difficulties of the sector? (e.g. lack of organic seeds, insufficient quantities of varieties bred in organic conditions such as Organic Varieties and organic Heterogeneous Material, lack of personnel, complex regulations)
SOLUTION	What solutions already exist on the market? How are these problems being solved at the moment? (e.g. raising awareness, companies specialised in seed multiplication, collaborating with research institutes, engaging farmers to start growing new crops)
UNIQUE VALUE PROPOSITION	What is unique about your business? What makes you better than competitors? Why should a customer choose you? (e.g. 100% organic, traceable, independent, locally adapted cultivars)
ADVANTAGE	What gives you an advantage compared to competitors? What assets does your organisation already have? (e.g. regional expertise, farmer relationships and support, trust and transparency, knowledge of the needs of organic and agroecology-oriented farms)
CUSTOMER SEGMENTS	Who are your customers? Are there more customer types that could be interested? (e.g. organic farmers, hobby gardeners, processors, public institutions)
CHANNELS	How are you reaching your customers? What channels are you using? (e.g. field days, webshop, organic fairs, direct contracts)
EARLY ADOPTERS	Who will be your first buyers? (e.g. pioneer organic farmers, community seed networks)
KEY METRICS	How do you measure success? What metrics will you follow to assess the business? (e.g. seed availability rate, number of registered varieties, farmer participation)
COST STRUCTURE	What are the costs of the business? Quantify them. (e.g. breeding, machinery, storage, certification, labour, salaries)
REVENUE STREAMS	How will you capture the revenue from your business? Is it a single revenue stream or multiple streams? (e.g. seed sales, training, subsidies, advisory, royalties)

The points below present the **main conclusions from the analysis carried out by LiveSeeding with the organic seed sector**, including producers, breeders, and other stakeholders. They reflect common challenges, priorities, and practical recommendations identified using the Business Model Canvas tool. They serve as **guidelines on what to pay attention to in business operations and what can help improve planning, market position, and financial sustainability**.



Key Takeaways from Business Model Canvas

- The organic seed sector faces structural challenges such as regulatory barriers, unstable demand due to derogations, high certification requirements, and fragmented value chains. Careful planning and strong coordination across the supply chain can help reduce risks and costs.
- Developing fully organic, traceable, and locally adapted seed solutions is a strong market advantage. Transparency, quality control, and reliable certification processes help build trust with organic farmers.
- Building organised networks and partnerships with farmer cooperatives, advisors, processors, and research institutions can improve efficiency, secure supply, and support innovation and knowledge exchange.
- Clearly defining customer segments such as professional farmers, gardeners, farms with direct sale, farm delivering to retail network and using suitable sales channels such as direct farmer networks, demonstration trials, fairs, and digital platforms helps increase market reach and improve sales performance.
- Regularly tracking operational, commercial, and strategic indicators such as certified seed output, discard rates, adoption rates, prices, and cost efficiency supports better business decisions and long-term growth.
- Ensuring financial sustainability through realistic cost planning and diversified income sources, such as seed sales, long-term contracts, farmer contributions, value chain collaborations, can strengthen resilience and make scaling up possible.

➤ **You have already worked on part of this information in the previous section (e.g. problems, Unique Value Proposition, customers, channels, revenue streams). Now it's time to go deeper.**



Business planning is a must-have – Business plan

A strong business idea needs strong financial planning. For organic seed producers and plant breeders, understanding costs and revenues in detail is essential to ensure stability, manage risks, and plan growth. Many businesses in the sector struggle not because of weak products, but because financial needs are underestimated or income expectations are unclear.

The business planning focuses on **three key financial areas** that every organic seed business should monitor regularly. Understanding the difference between one-time investments, recurring operating costs, and financial performance indicators makes it easier to plan production, pricing, and long-term strategy

1	Capital Costs (CAPEX)	One-time investments Includes investments in machinery, infrastructure, storage, vehicles, and other assets needed to start or expand operations. These costs are often high at the beginning and underestimating them can create cash-flow problems in the first years. This is one of the most common reasons small agri-businesses run out of cash in their first three years.
2	Operating Costs (OPEX)	Ongoing cost Covers all recurring expenses such as labour, certification, fuel, packaging, insurance, and laboratory testing. These repeat every year - often every month. Knowing your monthly OPEX tells you how much revenue you need to break even.
3	Financial Parameters	Key indicators Revenue, gross profit, net profit, return on investment (ROI), and payback period. These numbers tell you whether your business is viable and how long it will take for your investment to pay off.

➤ Now it's your turn To strengthen your business plan, take time to work through the following:

- 📌 Identify your main CAPEX needs for starting or scaling your activities
- 📌 Estimate your monthly and yearly OPEX as accurately as possible
- 📌 Define your expected revenue streams (products, services, licences, etc.)
- 📌 Calculate key financial indicators (profitability, ROI, break-even point)
- 📌 Assess how long it will take to recover your initial investment
- 📌 Check whether your current plan ensures financial sustainability over time

How to fund your breeding programme

Access to funding is a key challenge for organic seed and breeding entrepreneurs seeking to start or grow their businesses. Organic breeding and seed production take time and require investments, while financial returns often come later. This makes it important to understand available funding options and plan finances carefully.

Understanding the funding landscape

Various funding sources can support business development in different ways. Knowing how to use and combine these options can help reduce financial risks and improve long-term stability.

The LiveSeeding project analysed financing mechanisms available to organic seed and breeding initiatives across Europe. The landscape falls into three main categories:

Own business activity refers to income generated directly through market-based activities, such as seed sales, royalties, farmers' voluntary contributions and services (e.g. technical advice, network facilitation). This is the most stable and independent source of funding, but it often does not fully cover the long-term costs of breeding.

Public funding includes support from the EU, national and regional programmes. It is essential for research, innovation, and development activities, but is usually project-based, time-limited, and involves administrative requirements. CAP investment measures can support CAPEX investment, though they usually need 40-80% co-financing and pre-financing. These funding measures are sometimes very specific to particular topics and scattered across different European regions, making it difficult to gain an overview.

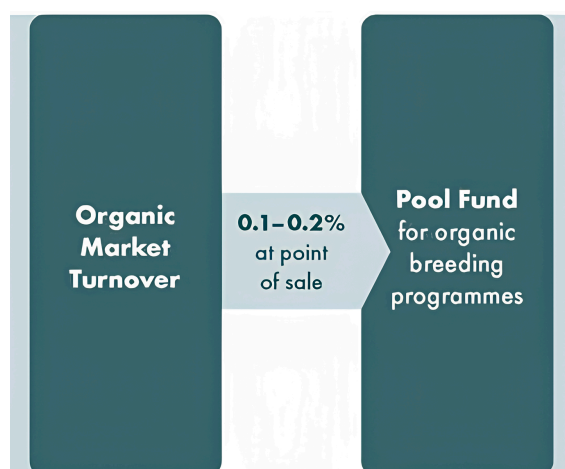
Private and community funding covers ethical financing, donations, crowdfunding, foundation support, and value chain cooperation. These mechanisms can provide flexibility and help engage stakeholders, but are often smaller in scale or short-term to medium-term.

The table below summarises the main characteristics, opportunities, and limitations of each funding mechanism.

Own business activity	Public Funding	Private & Community Funding
- Income from seed sales is a very important asset for economic sustainability, though the contribution to cover breeding effort changes according to crop (e.g., vegetable vs cereals) and contexts (e.g., countries with high use of certified seeds vs farm-saved seeds) - Royalties and farmer voluntary contributions usually cover only a minor part of the breeding costs. - Complementary services to farmers and other actors of the value chain can be an asset for funding source diversification and for increasing company visibility	- EU programmes (such as Horizon, EIP and LEADER) - National public funds exist in many countries, but rules and access are different everywhere. - Funding opportunities included in the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), including investment measures and especially those set for organic agriculture and agrobiodiversity. - Applying for public funding usually means paperwork, reporting and cooperation with large project partners. - Because funding is project-based and short or medium-term, it is hard to support long-term breeding activities.	- Donations and foundation support are very important, especially for non-profit breeding initiatives, and normally are short-term or medium-term. - Crowdfunding and match-funding involve consumers and citizens; they give high visibility, though they often bring small amounts of money. - Ethical banks have specific credits to organic businesses, also in the frame of social impact investment capital. - Cooperation across the value chain (farmers, processors, traders, retailers) allows shared investment and shared risk in breeding programmes.

Cross-sector pool funding strategy

Setting aside about **€1–2 for every €1,000 in sales of organic plant-based products** could provide significant funding for the European plant breeding sector (Figure 7). However, it is difficult to achieve agreement across the entire organic sector beyond individual agreements of breeding initiatives with processors and retailers.



➤ **With an organic market worth 49.4 billion € in the EU in 2024, this would equate to 49.4 million € for the promotion of organic plant breeding.**

Figure 7: Strategies for integrating breeding into value chain partnership (mod. from Winter, E. et al. 2021 - 'Sow what you sell: strategies for integrating organic breeding and seed production into value chain partnerships')

What makes funding mechanisms effective, from application to implementation?

To secure funding and build a financially sustainable business, organic seed producers and breeders must approach both daily operations and funding applications with the discipline of professional business planning. Here are five tips:

1. **Track all costs systematically throughout the year** - maintain accurate records of every expense category (labour, certification, trials, processing) so your budget figures for the next year are grounded in real data, not estimates.
2. **Diversify your income streams to reduce dependency on any single source** - combine seed sales, training services and public or private grants so that the loss of one revenue stream does not threaten the viability of the whole business.
3. **Monitor funding opportunities continuously, not just when cash is tight** - analyse open calls well in advance, as strong applications require time to prepare financial projections and align project goals with funder priorities.
4. **Align your funding applications with your business plan** - every project submitted to a funder should directly support a strategic goal already defined in your business plan.
5. **Build a clear post-grant financial model before you apply** - demonstrate from the outset how the activities funded by the grant will generate self-sustaining revenue, because funders consistently prioritise projects with a credible path to long-term financial independence.

Practical tip: Strengthen your financial strategy



Building a resilient breeding initiative requires integrating different funding sources into a coherent financial strategy. Rather than viewing funding streams separately, link public grants, community support, and market-based income to your overall financial planning. Use public funding to support innovation and development phases, while ensuring that your core activities are backed by more stable revenue streams, such as seed sales or service provision. Complement this with community-based contributions where relevant. By aligning funding choices with your business plan and long-term financial projections, you can improve financial stability, reduce risk, and create a more sustainable pathway for your breeding programme.

Business Plan Practical example: cost overview for a small organic seed producer

The table below presents a simple example of typical cost categories in an organic seed business. It helps illustrate the difference between one-time investments (CAPEX) and recurring expenses (OPEX), as well as the main income sources that can support financial sustainability.

Capital investments such as seed processing equipment or storage facilities form the foundation of operations, while annual or seasonal costs like labour, certification, and laboratory testing strongly influence cash flow.

COST CATEGORY	TYPE	NOTES
Seed processing equipment	CAPEX	One-time purchase, must budget for maintenance
Storage facility	CAPEX	Can be rented to reduce upfront cost
Organic certification	OPEX (annual)	Varies by certifier and country
Labour (seasonal)	OPEX	The highest recurring cost
Laboratory testing	OPEX	Germination, purity, health - required for sale
Variety registration or OHM notification	OPEX	EU regulated - plan for 2–4 year timelines

On the revenue side, subsidies/funds are the strongest pillar for financing OPEX by the 16 organic breeding initiatives monitored in LiveSeeding (Deliverable D.2, see Further Reading List). For these initiatives, the subsidies and funds used to cover OPEX largely come from public donors and are acquired competitively. On the other hand, the OPEX that is covered by sales stems primarily from sales of plant reproductive material (PRM), though training and advisory services are a secondary income with growing interest and demand. The pattern of financial sources looks different when looking at CAPEX. Mostly, financial means for CAPEX come from sales or other sources, like membership fees and the provision of other services as it is often difficult to get public funding for infrastructure investment.

➤ **Now it's your turn to work on the CAPEX, OPEX, key indicators, and revenue pathways of your business. Take your time and be as specific as possible.**



Info Box

LiveSeeding Organic Seed and Breeding Entrepreneurship Training Centre worked on training (see further reading) designed for existing initiatives seeking to strengthen their business strategies, as well as for actors interested in entering the organic seed and breeding sector, with particular attention on organic farmers and SME managers.

Through an integrated approach combining European-level online webinars, national on-site training, and the Entrepreneurship Focal Point, we developed videos, presentations and other resources related to:

- Key administrative, legal, financial, and training-related steps for entrepreneurship in the organic seed and breeding sector
- Marketing and promotion strategies for organic seeds at the local level
- Governance and finance models for organic seed and plant breeding in Europe
- Business model development and business planning



Key Messages

- Organic seed businesses in Europe face structural challenges such as fragmented markets, regulatory complexity, financial risks, and long breeding timelines.
- Strategic tools like SWOT analysis, Business Birdview, Business Model Canvas, and Business financial planning support better decision-making and business resilience.
- Strong collaboration across the value chain helps improve seed availability, reduce costs, and create new market opportunities.
- Diversified income sources, clear customer focus, and investment in innovation and skills are essential for sustainable growth.
- Strengthening organic seed SMEs contributes to climate-resilient agriculture, local seed systems, and the long-term development of the European organic sector.

Further reading

Want to explore this topic further? In this section you will find a selection of related resources. Click on any link to access the full resource. ✎



DELIVERABLES

[Deliverable D5.1 Report on bottlenecks and opportunities for the horizontal proliferation and scaling-up of the organic seeds and cultivar testing network](#)

[Deliverable D5.2 Report on financing and governance models for organic breeding initiatives](#)



TRAINING MODULES

[Training materials for the Organic Seed and Breeding Entrepreneurship Training Centre](#)



SCIENTIFIC PUBLICATIONS

[Sow what you sell: strategies for integrating organic breeding and seed production into value chain partnerships](#)



OTHER

[FACT SHEET: Governance and financing strategies in Organic Breeding](#)



[All materials from the LiveSeeding project.](#)

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