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DIVERSICROP action

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P4.3. Diversifying European diets with underutilized crops – insights from the DIVERSICROP action

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Underutilized crops offer significant potential to improve nutrition, strengthen food security and support more sustainable food systems in Europe. Peas, chickpeas and rye are nutrient-dense, environmentally resilient and culturally relevant crops whose potential remains underexploited in contemporary diets. This work, conducted within the DIVERSICROP action, synthesizes current knowledge on their nutritional value, health-promoting properties and agronomic benefits, while also exploring practical pathways for their wider dietary adoption.

Evidence from recent review studies shows that peas are rich in high-quality protein, dietary fiber, vitamins and minerals as well as bioactive compounds with antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties. Chickpeas provide valuable protein, fiber and micronutrients, although the presence of antinutritional factors may reduce bioavailability; these effects can be mitigated through processing methods such as soaking, fermentation and cooking. Rye contributes high levels of dietary fiber and functional compounds associated with digestive and cardiovascular health, while also supporting resilient and sustainable cereal production systems.

To translate scientific evidence into practical dietary solutions, the DIVERSICROP network is developing a collaborative European cookbook that collects traditional and innovative recipes featuring these crops. By integrating nutritional knowledge, sustainability considerations and culinary heritage, this initiative aims to promote healthier, taste-driven and environmentally sustainable diets across Europe.

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