

## Matthias Krön President of Donau Soja

We at Donau Soja are proud to host the world's leading soya researchers and experts for the 11<sup>th</sup> World Soybean Research Conference here in Vienna. Donau Soja, a progressive and change-oriented business organisation, is dedicated to support and foster European soya and plant protein supply chains. Our 330 members are active in sectors ranging from breeding, trading, processing, feed and food production, and even major supermarket chains -- our unique value chain approach setting us apart. Our vision is clear: **"A sustainable, safe, and European protein supply"**.

While being an independent organisation, **we have garnered support from 24 European governments through diplomatic declarations.** Working tirelessly at national and EU levels, we strive to improve soya production in Europe, while fostering networks and knowledge exchange. Spanning across 32 countries and operating from five strategic European locations, our team of 50 dedicated individuals is committed to making a positive difference. As publishers of the industry-leading monthly Market Report on European and global non-GMO soya markets, we have evolved into the leading European soya organisation.

This summer, we celebrate a remarkable milestone: **150 years of soya in Europe.** Back in 1873, close to this conference's venue, Japanese and Chinese delegations participated in Vienna's World Exhibition, capturing the imagination of Professor Friedrich Haberlandt. As one of the founding fathers of the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences (BOKU), he was tasked by the Austrian emperor Franz-Joseph I. with assessing agricultural cultivars from the Far East. It was the soybean that piqued Haberlandt's interest, particularly given its high protein and fat content for direct human consumption. He went on to procure seeds from Japan and China, eventually finding appropriate varieties suitable to Europe's climate. Conducting experiments in 150 locations across Europe, he orchestrated the widespread cultivation of soybeans on the continent. In 1878, he penned the first monograph on the soybean right here in Vienna – a watershed in the global proliferation of this versatile legume.

Today, the world requires passionate scientific endeavours, much like those Haberlandt engaged in. We face the critical challenge(s) of creating an equitable, resilient, and productive global food supply for our interconnected world while minimising emissions, preserving and enhancing invaluable biodiversity, and reducing pressures on planetary boundaries, particularly the nitrogen cycle. Unfortunately, the soybean has been associated with several issues plaguing the agri-food sector, including deforestation, biodiversity loss, and chemical overuse. Additionally, its incorporation into the regime of cheap meat has

deteriorated individual health and threatens to strain clear environmental tipping points -- approximately **75% of global cropping land is dedicated to animal feed.**

Simultaneously, global cropping patterns are now excessively simplified, with beans and corn dominating many regions in the Americas while grasses are prevalent in Europe. We firmly believe that cultivating a diversity of cropping patterns is vital for driving necessary change.

The unassuming soybean plays a pivotal role in the global food landscape and system, serving as one of the most significant sources of plant protein -- both for direct human consumption and animal feed. To **safeguard the future of humanity**, we must employ it wisely, recalibrating our imbalanced cropping patterns, promoting direct consumption as food, and alleviating pressures on sensitive ecosystems and the climate.

The effective cultivation, processing, trade, and utilization of this remarkable plant hold the key to our planet's future. At Donau Soja, we firmly believe that **science has a crucial role to play in driving transformative change** in agri-food systems. Appropriate funding for this necessary research is urgently needed. We welcome scientists to Vienna and look forward to a challenging, fruitful and engaging conference.

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