

To the
Fachagentur Nachwachsende Rohstoffe e.V. (FNR)
Dr. Andreas Schütte
Managing Director

July 2026

Open letter: Feedback on the webinar “Off the Peat Path” of 29 June 2026

Dear Dr. Schütte,

We participated in the webinar “**Off the Peat Path.**” According to the programme, the objective of the event was to provide an overview of the current state of peat reduction in European horticulture and developments in different Member States. Rather than presenting a balanced overview of the challenges and solutions related to peat reduction, large parts of the webinar focused on issues that were unrelated or indirectly related to the use of peat in growing media. The objective of the webinar was not achieved at all.

Scope of the webinar

The opening presentation by the European Commission focused almost exclusively on the implementation of the EU Nature Restoration Regulation and the restoration of degraded peatlands. While this is undoubtedly an important topic, it was only indirectly related to the announced focus of the webinar: peat reduction in horticulture.

The vast majority of peatlands to be restored are used for agricultural purposes and therefore concern issues that differ fundamentally from the use of peat in growing media. Consequently, the webinar began with a strong emphasis on a topic that addressed the specific challenges of horticulture and the transformation of growing media only to a limited extent.

Lack of balance or representation in the selection of speakers

Throughout the remainder of the programme, almost all presentations were delivered by representatives of public authorities, research institutions and non-governmental organisations. The European growing media industry, which has been actively driving the transformation of raw materials in growing media for many years, was not represented!

Companies and associations within the European growing media sector possess extensive practical experience in developing, testing and implementing alternative growing media constituents. Their expertise would have significantly contributed to linking scientific findings with the practical realities of implementing this transition.

Presentation of the situation in the Netherlands

We were particularly concerned about the presentation that should have focused on the actual developments in the Netherlands.

Stichting Turfvrij was invited to present the Dutch situation, despite no longer being part of the Dutch Covenant and therefore not representing either the current developments or the jointly agreed transition process. We ask ourselves what legitimizes Stichting Turfvrij to speak for the Netherlands, given that this campaigning NGO is no longer part of the covenant and has no interest in reaching a consensus.

In a letter dated 18 May 2026, VPN had already informed FNR that Stichting Turfvrij no longer has access to the current data of the Dutch Covenant and does not represent the jointly developed transition process. At the same time, VPN offered to provide a representative of the Dutch Covenant or of the Dutch growing media industry for the webinar. Unfortunately, this offer was refused.

The Dutch Covenant is widely recognised across Europe as an example of a cooperative approach involving industry, science, government and environmental organisations. This perspective was not reflected in the webinar.

Notably, this criticism was not limited to the undersigned persons. During the discussion, numerous participants, including representatives of Dutch companies, associations and research institutions, pointed out that Stichting Turfvrij does not represent the Dutch position and that the presentation therefore provided an incomplete picture of developments in the Netherlands. Several participants explicitly questioned why no representative of the Covenant had been invited and why organisations such as Growing Media Europe (GME) and Wageningen University & Research (WUR) could be directly criticised without being given the opportunity to respond.

Limited recognition of the progress already achieved

The webinar did not present a balanced picture of the substantial progress already made in reducing peat use within European horticulture. Over recent years, the European growing media industry has invested significantly in research and development, continuously increased the use of alternative raw materials and substantially reduced peat content in many growing media products. At the same time, successful transition processes have been established in cooperation with governments, researchers and other stakeholders, including the Dutch Covenant.

These developments and the progress already achieved received little attention during the webinar. As a result, the overall impression was that only limited progress had been made. A balanced assessment should acknowledge both the remaining challenges and the considerable achievements accomplished to date.

Insufficient focus on the key challenges of the transition

The central challenge of reducing peat use in horticulture is not the political objective itself, but how this transition can be achieved in practice while maintaining sustainable plant production and the competitiveness of European horticulture.

From our perspective, the webinar paid insufficient attention to the fundamental prerequisites for this transition. These include in particular:

- the long-term availability and security of supply of suitable alternative raw materials;
- the sustainable scaling-up of these raw materials across Europe;
- the development of robust cultivation systems based on scientifically validated growing trials;

- sufficient research capacities and long-term trial programmes covering different crops and climatic conditions; and
- the establishment of realistic transition pathways based on scientific evidence and practical feasibility.

During the discussion, participants repeatedly raised precisely these questions in the chat. Many remained unanswered.

Without reliable information on raw material availability, validated cultivation data and practical implementation strategies, it is difficult to assess how the ambitious objectives for peat reduction can realistically be achieved.

Limited opportunity for balanced discussion

During the webinar, statements were made concerning VPN, GME, IVG, WUR and the Dutch Covenant that, from the perspective of the organisations concerned, were incomplete, lacked appropriate context and bordered on defamation. It appeared that FNR either was complicit with these views or took no duty of care to go over the content of the presentations prior to the event.

The organisations concerned were only given the opportunity to respond later during the discussion, and in a manner that was unstructured and inconducive for appropriate discussion.

A balanced scientific debate requires that differing viewpoints are presented transparently and that all stakeholders are given an adequate opportunity to explain and discuss their positions. In our view, this standard was not fully met during the webinar.

Lack of a holistic assessment of sustainability

The presentations did not adequately delve into the broader aspects of growing media sustainability, focussing only on peat and its associated, and largely unquantified, impacts. There was a lack of comparison to impacts of other growing media materials, no consideration of supply chain dynamics, nor any discussion of the overall effects and consequences of peat reduction on the sustainability of horticulture overall. The discussion that developed in the comments demonstrated that the sustainability of growing media should not be assessed solely on the basis of peat content.

Focusing exclusively on peat content is, in our view, too narrow an approach. The assessment should instead consider the overall sustainability of the production system, including:

- greenhouse gas footprint,
- other environmental impacts (such as water use, land use, eutrophication, etc.)
- resource use efficiency,
- crop reliability and yield,
- plant health,
- product quality, and
- the security of supply for European horticulture.

A scientifically robust assessment should take all of these aspects into account. A detailed analysis of the aspects of sustainability that should be considered for growing

media can be found in this recent publication ([Aurdal et. al. 2026, Frontiers in Horticulture](#)).

Looking ahead

The undersigned organisations fully support the objectives of peatland protection, climate mitigation and resource conservation, as well as the continued reduction of environmental impact of growing media. The European growing media industry has been investing for many years in research, innovation and the implementation of new raw materials to meet the rising demand.

For this reason, we believe it is essential that future events include all relevant stakeholder groups and reflect both the latest scientific knowledge and the practical experience of those companies implementing the transition on a daily basis.

We therefore encourage FNR to ensure that future events are balanced by including representatives from science, public authorities, environmental organisations and industry alike, while providing sufficient opportunity for an open exchange of different perspectives. Only such an inclusive approach can facilitate a constructive, evidence-based dialogue on the future development of sustainable growing media.

GME, VPN and IVG remain committed to supporting FNR as technical and scientific partners and would welcome the opportunity to contribute their expertise to future conferences, workshops and dialogue formats.

Best regards,

Growing Media Europe (GME)



Cecilia Luetgebrune
Director General

Vereniging Potgrond- en Substraatfabrikanten Nederland (VPN)



Han de Groot
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