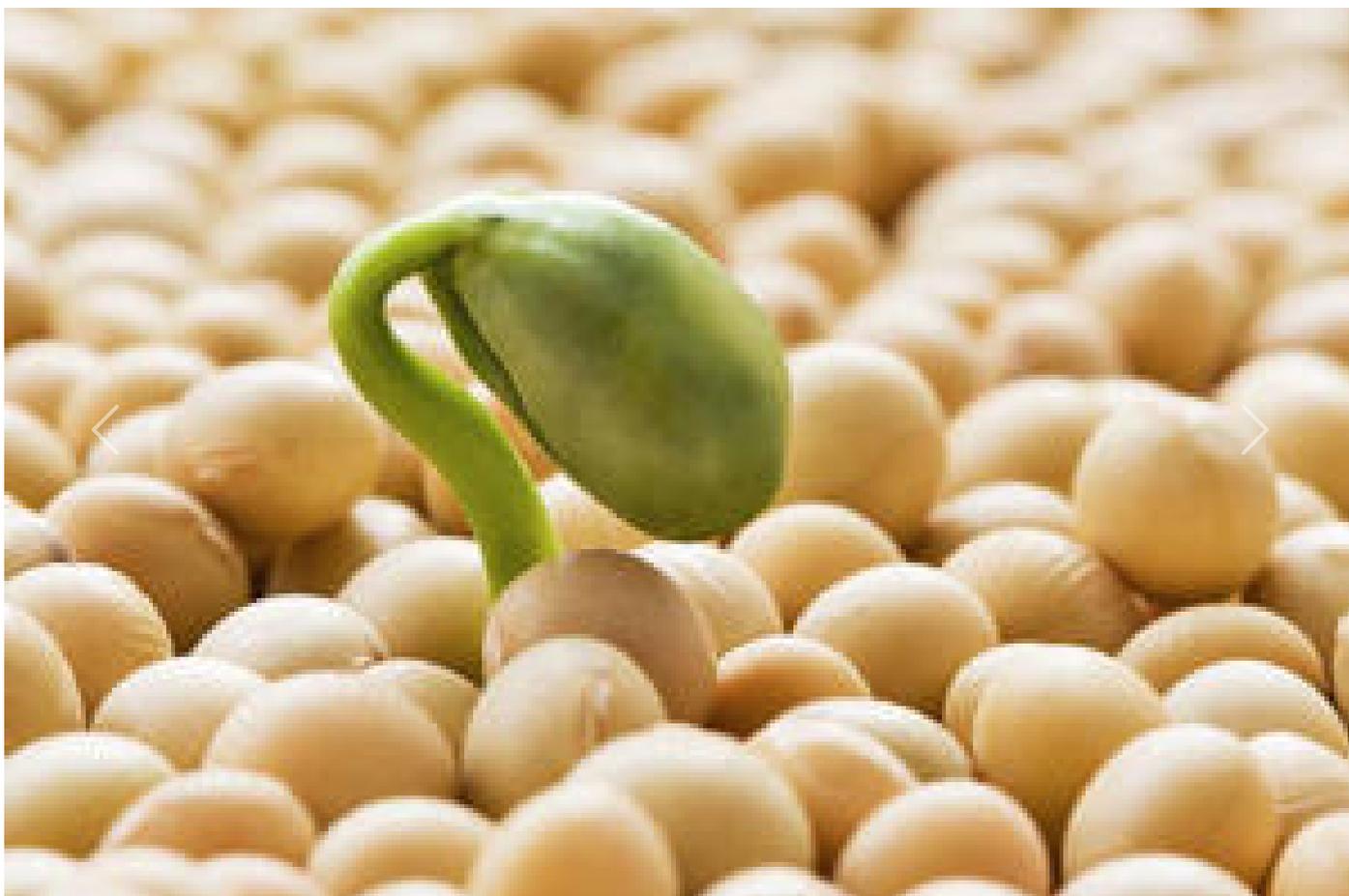# Danube Soybean – a chance for the development of soybean in Bulgaria

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From a historical perspective, the development of soybeans in Bulgaria is characterized by periods of upswing from 1934 to 1940 (700,000 decares) and from 1975 to 1985 (over 900,000 decares) and periods of decline – significantly reduced areas with production below 15–20 thousand decares, as is currently the case. The analysis of the periods of soybean upswing shows that economic incentives were the main driving factor for soybean development in Bulgaria. In 1934, the Bulgarian-German trading joint-stock company "Soya" for production and export was founded in our country. The company provided producers with seeds and the bacterial preparation Nitragin in advance and purchased the soybeans primarily for export to Germany. Although the yields were not high (the main soybean variety was Hungarian Small), the guaranteed purchase and good price stimulated even small producers, who grew soybeans on small areas in their yards. However, this successful model lasted only until the beginning of the Second World War.

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During the period 1975–1985, under the conditions of the planned agricultural economy, concentration and specialization of soybean production took place in 12 districts of Northern Bulgaria. A new scientifically based industrial technology for soybean production and new introduced American varieties (Hudson, Bison, Wayne, Williams, Amsoy, S-1346, etc.) were implemented. But during this period as well, the economic incentives undertaken by the state were leading, namely: meeting the needs of the rapidly developing livestock sector with its own protein source, accounting for mandatory state deliveries of feed grain through soybeans (1 kg of delivered soybeans accounted for 2.5 kg of feed grain), its purchase and processing in the oil extraction plants for sunflower was guaranteed. Investment in scientific programs and projects related to soybeans and irrigated agriculture was also a main priority of the state during this period.

The **"Danube Soya"** project was initiated by the "Austrian Soy Association" and the "Danube Soy Association" in 2012. The goal is improving the European protein supply within a comprehensive strategy based on internal resources. On 23.08.2013 in Moravske Toplice, Slovenia, the Minister of Agriculture and Food Prof. Dimitar Grekov signed: "Declaration on regional cooperation with the countries of the Eastern European Danube region for expanding the production of protein crops".

At the soybean congress in Augsburg (25–26.XI.2013), Deputy Minister Burhan Abazov, on behalf of Bulgaria, also signed the "Danube Soya" Declaration, which guaranteed our country's full and equal participation in the "Danube Soya" initiative. In practice, Bulgaria became one of the 17 countries from the wider Danube region participating in the project.

Soybeans and other leguminous crops from an agroecological point of view (soil and water conservation – measure 214) and from an agronomic point of view (related to crop rotation and their positive influence as preceding crops) are envisaged to be stimulated with a 2% subsidy for protein crops in the next programming period and will occupy an increasingly larger share in the rotation with other field crops.

At the closing of the second soybean congress in Augsburg, Germany (Danube Soya and European Protein Debate, 2013), Matthias Krön – Chairman of the Danube Soy Association, made the following summary analysis, which is indicative of the initiative's importance: "Danube Soya is a process that is developing and requires comprehensive measures and solutions from all interested parties – politicians, producers, traders, processors, consumers. Regional cooperation and the will for change at all levels – from farm to table – are very important. 'Danube Soya' is the last chance for GMO-free soybean production in Europe. 'Danube Soya' changes agriculture, changes food, changes habits, changes Europe as a whole."