Food of the Future – which perennial vegetables are novel foods?

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Summary

Perennial vegetables are robust and resistant to disease, compete well with weeds, and produce early in the spring. They are therefore particularly well suited to organic farming, both commercially and for home use. They have the potential to become an important part of our food supply, and there are many interesting species that could be cultivated.

There is considerable interest in new crops such as perennial vegetables, but knowing which ones are approved as food is a challenge. All novel foods must be reviewed and approved before they can be sold in order to protect consumers. Magazines and books suggest perennial vegetables as exciting new crops. Perennial vegetables are a heterogeneous group in terms of both historical use and status (novel food or not). For individual home gardeners, new crops may be of interest for their personal consumption, but for professional growers and food producers, it is important to know which species may be sold as food.

The report is based on a review of the EU's Novel Food Catalog, literature studies, and contact with the Swedish Food Agency in 2025.

Perennial vegetables that have been grown and consumed for a long time, may be sold as food
Ground elder, Welsh onion, Chinese chives, carlic chives, wild garlic, angelica, Good-King-Henry, rosebay willowherb, sea kale, sea fennel, chufa, common mallow, common sorrel, curly dock, garden sorrel, bladder campion, Chinese artichoke

Perennial vegetables are not included in the Novel Food Catalogue but have been consumed to a significant extent within the EU prior to May 15, 1997, may be sold as food
Tree onion, Babington onion, Victory onion, sea beet, perennial kale, sand mustard, lovage, mountain sorrel, spinach sorrel, shield sorrel, black salsify (root)

Perennial vegetables that are not included in the Novel Food Catalogue and were not consumed to a significant degree within the EU before 15 May 1997. They have been traditionally eaten in third countries (outside the EU). An assessment is required before they can be sold as food.
Persian shallot, udo, Japanese angelica tree, harebell, Siberian spring beauty, seombadi, Caucasian spinach, daylilys, hosta, Fischer’s ligularia, ostrich fern, burnet-saxifrage (leaf), cutleaf coneflower, stringy stonecrop

Species that are considered dietary supplements and may not be sold as food
Marsh-mallow, sweet cicely**,** burnet-saxifrage (root). Burnet-saxifrage is an example of a species where the leaves are approved as food but the roots are considered dietary supplements. Consultations are ongoing with the Swedish Food Agency regarding sweet cicely.

The food is considered new in the Novel Food Catalogue and must be approved before it can be sold as food.
Chinese onion, orpine

Prioritized perennial vegetables
Based on the literature study results and stakeholders ranking, a selection was made of prioritized perennial vegetables that are not included in the Novel Food Catalogue. These

need to be reviewed further. No support for historical use has been found in the literature - Caucasian spinach, Good King Henry (seed), black salsify (leaves and shoots). Support can be found in the literature for use in third countries - seombadi, hosta, stringy stonecrop, Siberian spring beauty.

Background

Growing crops in perennial systems binds carbon in the soil, reduces soil erosion, and increases biodiversity in cultivation, which are very important aspects of sustainable food systems (Sollen-Norrlin, Ghaley & Rintoul 2020; Toensmeier, Ferguson & Mehra 2020). In crops with perennial vegetables, the soil does not need to be disturbed by tillage and sowing every year. This benefits soil-dwelling organisms and improves soil structure (Helgason, Walley & Germida 2010; Da Silva et al. 2024). Above ground, wild bees benefit from the varied flowering and longer flowering period that often occurs in perennial cropping systems (Knauer, Durrer, Michez, Sentil & Albrecht 2026). Another important aspect is that perennial crops have time to develop deep roots and can absorb nutrients and water from deeper soil layers than annual crops (Thorup-Kristensen et al. 2020).

Perennial vegetables are robust and resistant to disease, compete well with weeds, and develop early (Weiss, Sjöberg & Larsson 2016; Toensmeier, Ferguson & Mehra 2020). They are therefore particularly well suited to organic farming, both professionally and for home use.

There is considerable interest in new crops such as perennial vegetables, but it is challenging to know which ones are approved for human consumption. Popular literature offers many suggestions for perennial vegetables as exciting new crops Figure 1. For individual home growers, these may be of interest for private consumption, but for professional growers and food artisans, it is important to know which species may be sold. During previous projects with perennial vegetables, the question of which perennial vegetables are approved has come up several times in conversations and survey responses with growers and nurseries.

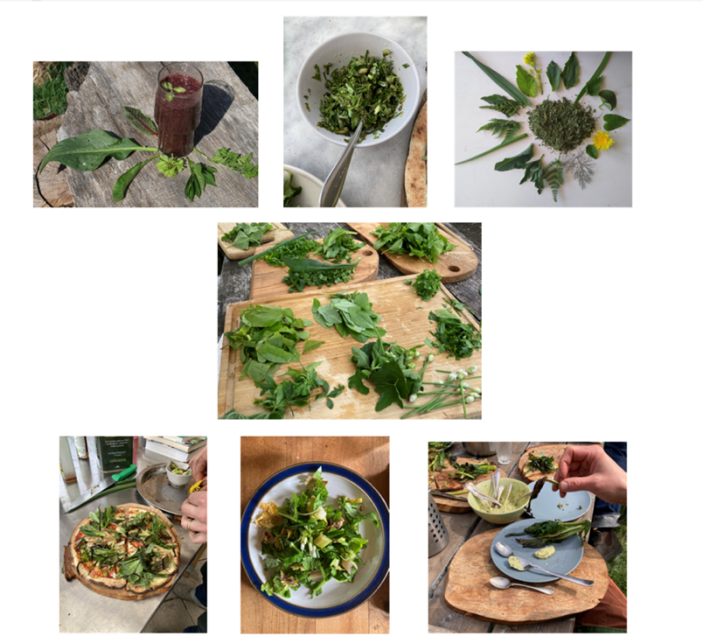

Figure 1 Dishes in which perennial vegetables are used in smoothies, salads, dried leafy greens, on pizza, and as flavourful vegetable mince. There is a lot of potential for developing new products and markets. Photo: A. Sjöberg and E. Johansson

Foods that were not consumed to any significant extent within the EU before May 15, 1997, are considered novel foods. To protect public health, novel foods must be risk assessed and approved before they can be sold according to eh Swedish Food Agency (Livsmedelsverket 2024). The status of a number of perennial vegetables (novel foods or not) is not clear and widely known, and professional growers, seed companies, nurseries, food artisans, and food processors may be hesitant to include them in their product range. The Novel Food Catalogue (Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety no date) sets out the EU countries' joint assessment of status, but it is difficult and time-consuming for individual companies to familiarise themselves with the regulations governing novel foods.

A review of the Novel Food Catalogue shows that there are a number of perennial vegetables that are not listed there. Some of these were widely consumed before May 15, 1997, while others are traditional foods from third countries, dietary supplements, or novel foods.

The aim of the project is to make it clear to organic farmers, nurseries, seed companies, and consumers which perennial vegetables are approved foods so that the crops can be included in organic production and contribute to the resilience of the farming system.

Project funding was granted in 2025 by the C. F. Lundström Foundation for Scientific Research and Social Purposes and the Flory Gates Scholarship Fund. Many thanks for your support!

Method

A systematic review of the Novel Food Catalogue was conducted to determine which perennial vegetables are currently approved, which have not been assessed, and which are not currently permitted to be sold as food.

The focus has been on hardy perennial vegetables that can be grown in fields and gardens in Sweden. Species mainly used as herbs or spices are not included in the project and are not discussed further.

To find evidence of consumption history, I searched the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences library database, the Plants for a Future database (Plants For A Future 2026), SKUD/Swedish cultivated plant database (Anon. no date) and Google Scholar. The search terms were the scientific name and food or edible. I have also searched books, reports, and newspaper articles. In the literature search, I have primarily chosen scientific references over other literature. I have mainly used sources that refer to use within the EU.

The result is a compilation of over sixty perennial vegetables, with status according to the new food regulations and references showing where they are consumed and grown, as well as their use.

Results

I sorted perennial vegetables into six categories according to their status in the Novel Food Catalog.

The first two categories, Perennial vegetables that are not novel foods and Perennial vegetables that are not included in the Novel Food Catalogue and have been consumed as food to a significant degree within the EU before 15 May 1997, list species that have been

consumed as food to a significant degree within the EU before 15 May 1997. These are not novel foods and can be sold.

The category Traditional foods from third countries includes perennial vegetables for which I have found evidence of use outside the EU. Perennial vegetables that are traditional foods from third countries (outside the EU) require approval by the EFSA (European Food Safety Authority).

The Swedish Food Agency's control wiki states: Foods classified as dietary supplements may only be placed on the market in the EU as dietary supplements. Dietary supplements are foods that are concentrated sources of nutrients or other substances with nutritional or physiological effects. The purpose of dietary supplements is to supplement a normal diet. If they are to be included in other foods, they are considered novel foods and must be approved first. (Swedish Food Agency 2024).

Finally, there are a handful of species that have been assessed as novel foods, as well as the consumption of new plant parts (e.g., leaves where the root is the usual food, seeds where leaves and shoots are approved foods).

The worksheet includes the scientific plant name and name in Swedish, current status in the Novel Food Catalogue, my proposed assessment (subspecies, has been consumed as food to a significant degree within the EU before May 15, 1997, traditionally consumed in third countries) and references supporting my assessment. Scientific references are listed starting in column F of the worksheet, and references from other literature are listed in columns further to the right. The worksheet is attached as Appendix 1.

The references can be used by stakeholders to decide which perennial vegetables they want to produce and sell and for which it may be better to postpone sales.

The headings below correspond to the information in the worksheet.

Perennial vegetables that are not novel foods

These are perennial vegetables that have been grown and consumed for a long time. They are listed in the Novel Food Catalogue as non-novel foods as they were consumed to a significant degree before May 15, 1997.

Table 1 Perennial vegetables that are not novel foods

Scientific name	**English**
Aegopodium podagraria	Ground elder
Allium fistulosum	Welsh onion
Allium roseum	Pink garlic, viper garlic or snake garlic
Allium ramosum	Chinese chives
Allium tuberosum Spreng.	Garlic chives
Allium ursinum	Wild garlic
Angelica archangelica	Angelica

Blitum bonus-henricus/ Chenopodium bonus-henricus	Good-King-Henry
Chamaenerion angustifolium/ Epilobium angustifolium	Rosebay willowherb, fireweed
Cichorium intybus	Chicory
Crambe maritima	Sea kale
Crithmum maritimum	Sea fennel
Cyperus esculentus	Chufa, tiger nut
Malva sylvestris	Common mallow
Nasturtium officinale	Water cress
Oxalis acetosella	Wood sorrel
Plantago maritima L.	Sea plantain
Rumex acetosa syn Rumex rugosus	Common sorrel
Rumex crispus	Curly dock, yellow dock
Rumex rugosus	Sorrel
Sanguisorba minor	Salad burnet, garden burnet, small burnet, burnet, pimpernelle
Silene vulgaris (Moench) Garcke	Bladder Campion, maidens tears
Stachys affinis	Chinese artichoke, Japanese artichoke, chorogi
Taraxacum sp.	Dandelion
Urtica dioica	Stinging nettle

Perennial vegetables that were widely consumed in the EU before May 15, 1997

These perennial vegetables are not included in the Novel Food Catalogue but were widely consumed in the EU before May 15, 1997.

Table 2 Perennial vegetables are not included in the Novel Food Catalogue but were widely consumed in the EU before May 15, 1997

Scientific name	**English**	**Comment**
Allium × proliferum	Tree onion, Egyptian walking onion	Not included in Novel foods catalogue history of consumption in EU prior to May 15 1997 (according to references) Swedish Food Authority: A quick online search for these plants reveals that there seems to be plenty of information about them, and many sellers offer seeds so you can grow and eat them. Email June 2025

Allium ampeloprasum var. ampeloprasum *Allium ampeloprasum var. babingtonii*	Elephant garlic Babington leek	Not included in Novel foods catalogue history of consumption in EU prior to May 15, 1997 (according to references)
Allium victorialis L.	Victoy onion	Not included in Novel foods catalogue history of human consumption in EU prior to May 15, 1997 (according to references)
Armoracia rusticana	Horseradish - root	Not included in Novel foods catalogue history of consumption in EU prior to May 15, 1997 (according to references)
Beta vulgaris ssp. maritima syn Beta maritima	Sea beet	Not included in Novel foods catalogue history of consumption in EU prior to May 15, 1997 (according to references)
Brassica oleracea spp.	Perennial kale	Not included in Novel foods catalogue history of consumption in EU prior to May 15, 1997 (according to references)
Diplotaxis tenuifolia	Wild rocket	Not included in Novel foods catalogue history of consumption in EU prior to May 15, 1997 (according to references) Swedish Food Authority: A quick online search for these plants reveals that there seems to be plenty of information about them, and many sellers offer seeds so you can grow and eat them. Email June 2025
Helianthus tuberosus	Jerusalem artichoke	Not included in Novel foods catalogue history of consumption in EU prior to May 15, 1997 (according to references)
Levisticum officinale	Lovage	Not included in Novel foods catalogue history of consumption in EU prior to May 15, 1997 (according to references)
Oxyria digyna	Mountain sorrel	Not included in Novel foods catalogue history of consumption in EU prior to May 15, 1997 (according to references)Swedish Food Authority: A quick online search for these plants reveals that there seems to be plenty of information about them, and many sellers offer seeds so you can grow and eat them. Email June 2025

Plantago lanceolata L.	Narrowleaf plantain	Not included in Novel foods catalogue history of consumption in EU prior to May 15, 1997 (according to references)
Pseudopodospermum hispanicum/ Scorzonera hispanica	Black salsify - root	Not included in Novel foods catalogue history of consumption in EU prior to May 15, 1997 (according to references)
Rumex patientia	Patience dock, garden patience	Not included in Novel foods catalogue history of consumption in EU prior to May 15, 1997 (according to references). Swedish Food Authority: A quick online search for these plants reveals that there seems to be plenty of information about them, and many sellers offer seeds so you can grow and eat them. Email June 2025
Rumex scutatus	French Sorrel	Not included in Novel foods catalogue history of consumption in EU prior to May 15, 1997 (according to references)
Sium sisarum	Skirret	Not included in Novel foods catalogue history of consumption in EU prior to May 15, 1997 (according to references). Swedish Food Authority: A quick online search for these plants reveals that there seems to be plenty of information about them, and many sellers offer seeds so you can grow and eat them. Email June 2025

Perennial vegetables that are traditional foods from third countries

These are perennial vegetables that are not included in the Novel Food Catalogue and were not consumed to a significant degree in the EU before May 15, 1997. They have been traditionally eaten in third countries (outside the EU). An assessment is required before they can be sold.

The Swedish Food Agency writes: Foods that are new to the EU may have been widely consumed in countries outside the EU, known as third countries. Such novel foods are defined in Article 3.2(c) of Regulation (EU) 2015/2283 as traditional foods from third countries. Long-term consumption of a food from a third country without any effects on the health of the population can be used as evidence that the food is safe if it has been part of the normal diet of a large number of people. The threshold for long-term consumption has been set at 25 years, see Article 3.2(b) of Regulation (EU) 2015/2283. (Swedish Food Agency 2026)

Table 3 Perennial vegetables that are traditional foods from third countries

Scientific name	**English**
Allium hirtifolium syn. Allium stipitatum Regel.	Persian shallot
Aralia cordata	Udo
Aralia elata	Japanese angelica tree
Campanula L.	Bellflowers
Cirsium oleraceum (L.) Scop.	Cabbage thistle or Siberian thistle
Claytonia sibirica	Siberian spring beauty
Dystaenia takesimana (Nakai)	Seombadi
Hablitzia tamnoides	Caucasian spinach
Hemerocallis citrina Baroni.	Daylily
Hemerocallis fulva 'Flore pleno'	Daylily
Hosta spp.	Hosta
Hylotelephium spectabile	Showy stonecrop
Humulus lupulus L.	Hops
Ligularia fischerii	Fischer’s ligularia (gomchwi in Korean)
Matteuccia struthiopteris	Ostrich fern
Pimpinella saxifraga L.	Burnet-saxifrage, solidstem burnet saxifrage, lesser burnet
Rudbeckia laciniata	Cutleaf coneflower
Sedum sarmentosum	Stringy stonecrop

Food supplements

FS (food supplement) means that the food has historically been consumed as a dietary supplement, but that there is no evidence of consumption in other foods.

The Swedish Food Agency's control wiki states: Dietary supplements are consumed in a different way, to a different extent, and for partly different reasons than other foods, and therefore consumption patterns are not comparable with other foods. Foods that prior to May 15, 1997, were only used in dietary supplements are therefore new if they are intended for use in other foods. (Swedish Food Agency 2024)

Species that are considered dietary supplements and may not be sold as food are marshmallow (*Althaea officinalis*) and sweet cicely (*Myrrhis odorata*). Salad burnet (*Sanguisorba minor*) is included as an example of a species where the leaves are approved as food but the roots are classified as dietary supplements.

Table 4 Perennial vegetables that are classified as dietary supplements

Scientific name	**English**
Althaea officinalis	Marsh-mallow
Myrrhis odorata) (L.) Scop.	Sweet cicely
Pimpinella saxifraga L.	Burnet-saxifrage, solidstem burnet saxifrage, lesser burnet

I have submitted a consultation request to the Swedish Food Agency (February 2026) for sweet cicely, as during the course of the project I came into contact with Eric de Vahl (gene bank curator, Department of Landscape Architecture, Planning and Management, SLU), who has produced historical evidence that it has historically been eaten as a vegetable in Sweden.

Perennial vegetables that are novel foods

The food has been assessed as novel in the Novel Food Catalogue (Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety, no year specified). These must be approved before they can be sold.

Table 5 Perennial vegetables that are novel foods

Scientific name	**English**
Allium chinense	Chinese onion, Bakers garlic, Rakkyo
Sedum telephium L.	Orpine

Perennial vegetables with consumption of new plant parts

These are vegetables where a part of the plant that has not been eaten before may be edible. This use is not included in the Novel Food Catalogue as the plant part has not been consumed to a significant degree within the EU before May 15, 1997, and there is no evidence of a history of consumption.

For these, a risk assessment by EFSA (European Food Safety Authority) should be carried out before companies release them on the market.

Table 5 Perennial vegetables with consumption of new plant parts

Scientific name	**English**
Blitum bonus-henricus/ Chenopodium bonus-henricus	Good-King-Henry - fruit
Pseudopodospermum hispanicum/ Scorzonera hispanica	Black salsify - leaf

Prioritized perennial vegetables

Based on the literature review, I selected perennial vegetables that are not included in the Novel Food Catalogue and sent them to stakeholders (professional growers, seed companies, nurseries, food artisans, and food processors). The decision on which vegetables to proceed with is based on responses from stakeholders.

The next step was to ask the Swedish Food Agency about the historical consumption of the prioritized species, as evidence of this among member states would indicate that the vegetables were approved. A list of the prioritized species was sent to the Swedish Food Agency (Appendix 2).

In the fall of 2025, the Swedish Food Agency asked other member states if they were aware of historical consumption of the priority species in their countries. The Swedish Food Agency's case officer writes in an email *Unfortunately, we have not received many responses from them – there is simply not much information available. However, other Member States have also taken note of the interest in perennial plants and have received a lot of questions about their historical consumption. Spain has received inquiries about hundreds of species and 10 official consultation requests.* (Astrid Walles-Granberg 2025)

Based on the information I have obtained and the Swedish Food Agency's response, I have sorted the priority species into two categories – those without support for historical use in the literature and those with support in the literature for use in third countries. These species will probably need to be assessed by EFSA before they can be sold within the EU.

1. No support for historical use has been found in the literature

Caucasian spinach, *Hablitzia tamnoides* – leaves and shoots

Good King Henry, *Blitum bonus-henricus* – seeds

Black salsify, *Scorzonera hispanica* – leaves and shoots

2. Support is found in the literature for use in third countries

Seombadi, *Dystaenia takeshimana* – leaves and shoots

Hosta, *Hosta sp*. – leaves and shoots

Stringy stonecrop, *Sedum sarmentosum* – leaves and shoots

Siberian spring beauty, *Claytonia sibirica* – leaves and shoots

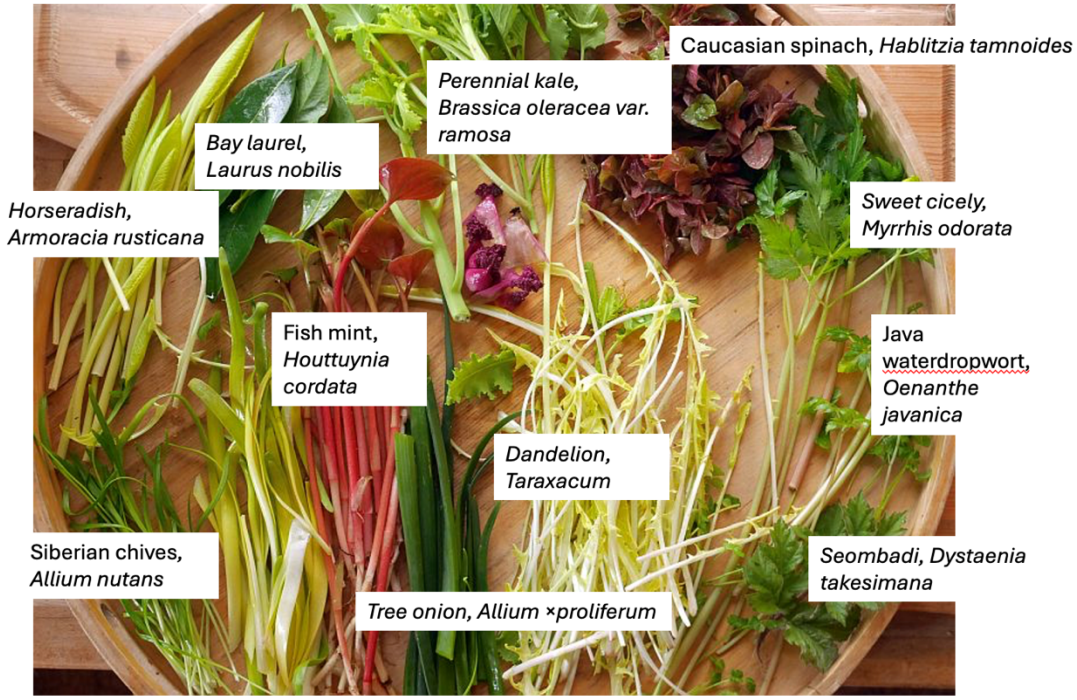

Figure 2 Stephen Bastow's April harvest of perennial vegetables from roots stored in a dark, frost-free place. He grows and eats many vegetables that are classified as novel foods. Photo S. Barstow.

Discussion

There is considerable interest in perennial vegetables both in Sweden and in other EU member states. Seed companies, nurseries, and artisan food producers sell perennial vegetables. Response to a query from the Swedish Food Agency's showed that other EU member states have also noticed the interest in perennial plants and received many inquiries about them.

Spontaneous email comments from stakeholders in 2025 - *What a fantastic initiative. Thank you! It's so great that you're doing this. Thank you for the opportunity to influence. It will be exciting to follow the project. What a wonderful job! It's great that you're doing this! Thank you!*

A search of the Novel Food Catalogue yielded a somewhat unexpected result, with approved species such as fireweed (*Chamaenerion angustifolium*), Chinese artichoke, (*Stachys affinis*), nutgrass (*Cyperus esculentus*) and bladder campion (*Silene vulgaris*). The fact that a perennial vegetable is not considered a novel food does not, therefore, mean that the species is commonly found in shops, that it is grown on a large scale or across a wider geographical area.

Nor does the fact that a species is not listed in the Novel Food Catalogue mean that it is a novel food requiring approval. Mountain sorrel (*Rumex patientia*), lovage (*Levisticum officinale*) and skirret (*Sium sisarum*) are not included in the Novel Food Catalogue but were consumed as food on a large scale within the EU prior to 15 May 1997.

New species are added to the Novel Food Catalogue on an ongoing basis. Good King Henry - leaf (*Blitum bonus-henricus* leaves), sea fennel (*Crithmum maritimum*) and common mallow (*Malva sylvestris*) are perennial vegetables that have been consumed for a long time and were added to the Novel Food Catalogue as authorised foods in 2025 and 2026.

Caucasian spinach (*Hablitzia tamnoides*) leaves and shoots, Good King Henry – seeds (*Blitum bonus-henricus*) and black salsify – leaves and shoots (*Scorzonera hispanica*) are species for which an EFSA assessment is likely to be required, as no evidence of historical use has been found in the literature.

Daylily (*Hemerocallis citrina*), udo (*Aralia cordata*), seombadi (*Dystaenia takesimana*), hosta (*Hosta* sp.) and stingy stonecrop (*Sedum sarmentosum*) are examples of species consumed to a greater extent in China, Japan and/or Korea as traditional foods, but which are not included in the Novel Food Catalogue. Species in the traditional food category for which I have found only isolated evidence of consumption, such as cutleaf coneflower (*Rudbeckia laciniata*) and bellflowers (*Campanula sp.*). Those consumed to a greater extent should be eligible for approval by EFSA under the third-country rules.

In summary, perennial vegetables are a heterogeneous group both in terms of historical use and their novel food status. They have the potential to become an important part of our food supply, and there are many interesting species that could be approved as food.

I have applied for funding to continue the work in 2026, focusing on the perennial vegetables that the stakeholders identified as prioritized species.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Worksheet Future Food March 2026.xlxs

Attached.

Appendix 2

Perennial vegetables that were not included in the Novel Food catalogue at the start of the project. This list has been sent to stakeholders as a basis for deciding which vegetables to proceed with in the consultation request and in the next stage of the project.

Scientific name	**English**	**Comment**
Allium hirtifolium syn. Allium stipitatum Regel.	Persian shallot	References of consumption in third countries.
Aralia cordata	Udo	References of consumption in third countries.
Aralia elata	Japanese angelica tree	References of consumption in third countries.
Asphodeline lutea (L.) Rchb	Junkerlilja	References of consumption in EU
Blitum bonus-henricus syn. Chenopodium bonus-henricus fruit	Good King Henry - fruit	*Novel food*
Campanula latifolia	Bellflower	References of consumption in third countries.
Centranthus ruber	Pipört	References of consumption in EU
Claytonia sibirica	Siberian spring beauty	*Novel food*
Dystaenia takesimana (Nakai)	Seombadi	References of consumption in third countries.
Hablitzia tamnoides	Caucasian spinach	*Novel food*
Hemerocallis citrina Baroni.	Daylily	References of consumption in third countries.

Hemerocallis fulva 'Flore pleno'	Daylily	References of consumption in third countries.
Hosta spp.	Hosta sp	References of consumption in third countries.
Ligularia fischerii	Fischer's ligularia	References of consumption in third countries.
Matteuccia struthiopteris	Ostrich fern	References of consumption in third countries.
Mertensia maritima	Oyster plant	Currently sold in EU
Plantago coronopus	Buck's-horn plantain	References of consumption in EU
Plantago lanceolata	Narrowleaf plantain	References of consumption in EU
Rudbeckia laciniata	Cutleaf coneflower	References of consumption in third countries.
Scorzonera hispanica	Black salsify - leaf	Novel food
Sedum sarmentosum	Stringy stonecrop	References of consumption in third countries.
Smyrnium olusatrum	Alexanders	References of consumption in EU
Tripolium pannonicum	Sea aster	References of consumption in EU