

Bejo invests in new Dongen facility to accelerate lettuce breeding and speed breeding

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The new site, acquired from a former orchid greenhouse, will replace Bejo's Breda facility and expand its capacity for speed breeding, supported by a large electricity connection, 2,650 solar panels and battery storage



Bejo has completed the acquisition of a new facility in Dongen, the Netherlands, as part of a strategic investment to expand its lettuce breeding programme and accelerate the development of new varieties. The site, a former orchid greenhouse, will replace the company's current lettuce breeding facility in Breda, with the relocation expected to take place in summer 2027.

The investment comes as advances in plant breeding place greater demands on infrastructure, particularly facilities capable of supporting controlled growing conditions and faster breeding cycles. For Bejo, the Dongen site provides the additional space and technical capacity needed to scale its speed-breeding activities while keeping the lettuce programme within the same region.

A major advantage of the new location is its extensive electricity connection. This will allow Bejo to expand its use of speed breeding, a technique that enables breeders to shorten generation times under controlled growing conditions and move promising genetic material through breeding cycles more rapidly.

For a crop such as lettuce, where breeding cycles and market requirements can move quickly, the ability to accelerate the development and evaluation of new varieties can provide a significant competitive advantage. Bejo sees the additional capacity as a way to strengthen its ability to develop varieties that offer growers reliable performance across changing production conditions.

Jenco Krooneman, General Manager of Bejo Benelux, said the investment creates the space required to further develop the company's lettuce breeding programme while preserving operational continuity in the region. "With this investment, we are creating the space to further develop our lettuce breeding programme. The site not only offers the technical capabilities we need, but also enables us to remain active in the same region. That is important for the continuity of our operations and for our colleagues," Krooneman said.

The facility also gives Bejo an opportunity to combine breeding expansion with improvements in energy management. The former orchid greenhouse is equipped with around 2,650 solar panels and a battery storage system, providing the infrastructure to generate and store electricity and manage energy consumption more efficiently.

That combination is increasingly relevant for modern breeding operations, where controlled environments can require substantial and consistent energy inputs. By retaining an existing greenhouse facility and using its renewable-energy infrastructure, Bejo can expand its breeding capacity while integrating energy efficiency into the development of the new site.

The company's focus on speed breeding is central to the investment. Bejo had already begun using the technique at its Breda facility, but available space limited the scope for further expansion. Roel Veenstra, Head of Breeding at Bejo, said lettuce is a fast-growing and dynamic crop, making the ability to accelerate breeding particularly important. He said the Dongen facility will allow Bejo to take its speed-breeding programme to the next level while providing experienced employees with opportunities to develop alongside the expanded operation.

"Lettuce is a fast-growing and dynamic crop. We had already started speed breeding in Breda, but we couldn't grow any further there. The site in Dongen offers us the opportunity to further develop this technique and take our lettuce programme to the next level. I also think it's important that we remain in the same region, so that our experienced colleagues can grow with us," Veenstra said.

The regional continuity is also an important element of the investment. Rather than moving the programme to a different part of the country, Bejo is shifting its operations from Breda to nearby Dongen, allowing the company to retain access to its existing pool of experienced breeding and technical personnel.

The acquisition is now complete and Bejo has begun preparations to commission the facility. Work will include adapting the greenhouses for Bejo's crops, creating additional speed-breeding cells and expanding office and canteen facilities. The move is scheduled for summer 2027, giving Bejo time to prepare the site for the requirements of its lettuce breeding programme. The company expects the expanded infrastructure to provide greater flexibility for breeding activities while supporting the development of new varieties for growers in its markets.

The investment also illustrates how seed companies are increasingly treating breeding infrastructure as a strategic asset rather than simply a research facility. Faster breeding cycles, controlled environments, energy availability and data-driven selection are becoming increasingly important as growers seek varieties capable of delivering consistent performance amid changing production conditions.

Dongen facility brings those requirements together in one location. Its combination of expanded greenhouse capacity, speed-breeding infrastructure and renewable-energy assets is intended to give the lettuce programme room to grow without breaking its operational links with the region. With commissioning preparations under way and the relocation planned for 2027, the company is effectively laying the physical foundation for the next phase of its lettuce breeding strategy.