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Other plants that can replace sugarcane are available but the European Union is still prohibiting them from being sold as a food supplement or additive.

This emerged from an interview carried out with molecular and cellular biologist Renald Blundell.

The Paraguayan plant Stevia, for example, has a low Glycemic Index but is 600 times sweeter than glucose. A small granule of Stevia contains the same sugar content as six spoonfuls of sugar. The plant is also healthier to use and might even be of benefit to diabetics.

“Unfortunately there are no European toxicity studies, but it has been widely used in the United States for the past 15 years and is available online. Then again, we know how toxic cigarettes are and yet they are widely available. If it’s safe in the US why shouldn’t it be safe in Europe?” he asked.

“I had tried to import this plant into Malta to study its properties but trying to introduce it in Europe seems to be a threat for the sugar producers. The bargaining power of these producers is much higher than that of consumers at EU level. So consumers are left without a choice; while a person has the right to buy 10 bottles of vodka in one night and get wasted, a diabetic cannot buy a plant that could be beneficial for him or her,” explained Dr Blundell.

Another cactus-like herb, Hoodia, contains a protein named P53, which is very similar to glucose. This plant is also beneficial for both obese people and diabetics because it suppresses sugar cravings and therefore causes less harm to the body because less sugar is consumed.

“The plant can be consumed in the form of tea or capsules but it is also banned in Malta because there is a lack of evidence on its beneficial properties. In my opinion this is an excuse, because openly wants to take responsibility for it,” added Dr Blundell.