

**Germany: Dottenfelder Hof awarded Förderpreis on organic agriculture**

On behalf of the farm community Dietrich Bauer, plant breeder on the Dottenfelder Hof near Frankfurt was awarded the first prize by German Agriculture Minister Renate Künast. The prize, worth 10.000 €, was handed over during the Green Week fair in Berlin. The Jury acknowledged the exemplary integration of the preservation of plant genetic resources and organic plant breeding in the whole farm concept of the Dottenfelder Hof. Especially the outstanding achievements in the development of vegetable varieties was emphasized by the jury. Concerning breeding goals the breeders of the Dottenfelder Hof lay special emphasis on taste and harmony in growth and shape – breeding goals that are fundamentally different to those of conventional breeding programmes in which yield an external quality traits are the main focus. An additional bonus stressed by the jury was the fact that plant breeding activities on the Dottenfelder Hof are mainly done in the public interest.

By [Klaus-Peter Wilbois](#)

**ECO-PB participates in EU / ICC-Cereal Conference 2002**

The EU / ICC-Cereal Conference 2002 taking place in Vienna on 6 –8 March, 2002. The conference is organised with support of the Austrian Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Environment and Water Management. The theme of the conference is: Implementation of the European Research Area (ERA). It aims at creating the conditions for an European

initiative for co-ordinated cereal research activities resulting in a significantly higher output. ECO-PB, as representative of the organic sector was asked to take part with a contribution on the main issues concerning the provision of breeding material for the organic sector. The participation of ECO-PB is co-ordinated by Edith Lammerts van Bueren of Louis Bolk Institute in Holland.

By [Klaus-Peter Wilbois](#)

**Switzerland: official organic variety tests unique in Europe**

Beginning with the autumn sowing season in 2001, the Swiss organic variety trials for winter wheat have reached official variety testing status. This means that from now on a variety can be accepted for the National Catalogue of Varieties based on the results of the organic trials – without necessarily having to perform well under conventional / integrated conditions. This opportunity is unique throughout Europe. When the bilateral contracts between the EU and Switzerland will have been ratified, this will give breeders the chance to deal such varieties within all of the EU without further official examination. Contact: Mathias Menzi, e-mail:

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By [Christine Arncken](#)

**Switzerland: results of organic winter wheat and barley variety tests available**

The results of the Swiss organic variety trials from 2000/2001 are being published and can be ordered. Most wheat varieties tested were of high quality (average 12.3 % protein, individual grain weight average

44.7 mg. weight of hundred litres average 81.0 kg). Resistances are mostly very good. Yield of tested varieties averages 5.05 tons/hectare. The best Swiss variety was Titlis. Contact: Mathias Menzi, email: [mathias.menzi@fal.admin.ch](mailto:mathias.menzi@fal.admin.ch)  
By [Christine Arncken](#)

**Large attendance at „Organic Agriculture and Plant Breeding“ Conference**

About 150 people participated in the Conference “Organic Agriculture and Plant Breeding” organised by the German foundation “Zukunftstiftung Landwirtschaft” held on January, 26 in Frankfurt. Chairman Oliver Willing could welcome an international public of organic farmers, as well as representatives of the most important organic plant breeders, scientists and officials of the German federal authorities. Last but not least there were a lot of important donors which got an impression of the foundation’s diverse activities.

At the opening of the conference Dr. Karl Josef Müller, biodynamic wheat breeder, held an impressive speech about a future change of paradigm in research. He called for not talking of plant disease and plant protection anymore but of plant health research.

Müller’s speech was followed by three interesting lectures. Biodynamic vegetable breeder Ms. Kirchgäßner (Kultursaat e.V.) spoke about the evolution of plants from the primitive form of moss up to the three dimensional morphology of most agricultural plants as a great cultural performance of mankind.

Prof. Dr. Maria Finckh (Dep. of Plant Protection, Univ.

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of Witzhausen) explained different aspects of plant diseases. E.g., if an apple decomposes under a tree it can mean a loss of income for the farmer, but for the plant it is an essential condition to fulfil lifecycle and set its seeds free. Biodynamic wheat breeder Dr. Hartmut Spiess (Institut for Biodynamic Research, Darmstadt) completed the morning session with practical advice to keep plants healthy. Lively discussions rounded off the lectures.

In the afternoon the audience split up into four working groups on different subjects of plant disease and plant protection.

Later on, the audience gathered again to hear the very interesting lecture of Peter Kunz, biodynamic wheat breeder of Switzerland. He called for a new view on plant diseases as welcome indicators of disorders and as regulating factors of imbalance in plant growth.

It remains the hope that this meeting gave a strong impulse to organic plant breeders to continue their taken way and to donors to reinforce the urgently needed support.

By [Andreas Thommen](#)

#### **4th ISTA-PDC Seed Health Symposium**

April 29 – May 1, 2002 the Plant Disease Committee of the International Seed Testing Association will organise his 4th ISTA-PDC Seed Health Symposium under the title: Healthy Seeds, the basis for sustainable farming. The symposium will be held in Wageningen (see [www.seedcentre.nl](http://www.seedcentre.nl)). The organisers want to pay special attention to organic seeds and their

problems and solutions in production and use, in one of the sessions. The deadline for abstract submission is 15 March, 2002.

By [Edith Lammerts van Bueren](#)

#### **CMS without restorer genes**

Since the international workshop in Driebergen-NL, last October, several questions have reached ECO-PB concerning cms hybrids without restorer genes. In a number of crops like sugar beet and onions, it is hard to find modern varieties that are not male sterile. The question is how to handle this issue on the short term. The Dutch seed company Bejo said that they can bring fertile hybrids on the market but that means that some of the well known, good performing varieties will no longer be available for the organic market.

By [Edith Lammerts van Bueren](#)

#### **The marketing of seed of “conservation varieties” in EU**

On January 22 and 23, 2002, a meeting in Brussels was held on the implementation of the Directive 98/95/EC concerning the marketing of seed of “conservation varieties”. Edith Lammerts van Bueren was asked to provide the Dutch delegate with information on the viewpoints from the organic sector. She prepared a position paper together with biodynamic breeder Karl-Josef Müller, who has already been active on this issue for some years in Germany. There will be a next meeting this spring, so it is of importance that the organic sector makes clear how this category of seeds can be of importance for the organic sector: Old landraces as such are usually not adapted to modern or-

ganic agriculture. But old varieties do have interesting traits for the organic sector and can be improved by on farm conservation and by mixing or crossing them with modern varieties for certain improvements. The EU directive is only meant for small amounts of seed for limited, regional use and therefore will not be of any importance for competition to modern commercial varieties.

However, the discussion in Brussels stressed that this category is only to be used for original landraces, and not for new varieties. Mixing or crossing landraces with modern varieties is creation of a new variety which should meet the ‘normal’ standards for admittance to the market. If this position will succeed, it will mean that the organic sector will not be able to use the concept of population varieties, which is the underlying concept of landraces. For more information see position paper Eco-PB, background papers or contact your national delegate.

By [Edith Lammerts van Bueren](#)

#### **Association of bio-dynamic plant breeders**

On December 5th, 2001, German and Swiss bio-dynamic cereal and vegetable breeders united and founded the “Association of bio-dynamic plant breeders (ABDP)”. The reason is the need of bio-dynamic breeders to have their own representatives in public institutions. Background is the discussion on hybrids: IFOAM and EU drafts for future organic plant breeding regulations are not excluding hybrid breeding up till now, as bio-dynamic breeders and Demeter-Bund

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would have suggested. Neither the quality viewpoints regarding nutrition nor the socio-economic implications of hybrid breeding were aspects that could convince representatives of other organisations and countries, mainly due to economic reasons.

Persons that professionally deal with bio-dynamic plant breeding are invited to join the association and to thus help acting for common goals.

The association applied for full membership in the European consortium for organic plant breeding (ECO-PB).

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[www.abdp.org](http://www.abdp.org) (in German)

By [Christine Arncken](#)

#### **ECO-PB Position paper on conservation varieties**

is available on the Web site of ECO-PB under [www.ECO-PB.org/09/pp.htm](http://www.ECO-PB.org/09/pp.htm)

If representatives experts or representatives in the sector would like to comment on this issue please contact [Edith Lammerts van Bueren](#) of Louis Bolk Institute (NL). Proposals are welcomed until 04<sup>th</sup> of March 2002.

#### **More on the Mexican GM Maize Scandal - Unnatural Rejection?**

The academic squabble over Nature magazine's peer-reviewed article is anything but academic. More than 144 farmer and other Civil Society Organizations from 40 countries have signed a Joint Statement on the Mexican GM Maize Scandal that was released on Tuesday, February 19th. The Statement comes on the eve of an international science policy

meeting in Los Banos, Philippines where a global response to the scandal will be discussed. The 144 organizations are demanding that the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) work together with the Convention on Biological Diversity to halt the contamination of the Mesoamerican Centre of Genetic Diversity for maize – one of the world's most important food crops. News that genetically modified (GM) maize was turning up in farmers' varieties first appeared in Nature Biotechnology last September and was confirmed in November by a peer-reviewed article in Nature. According to the 170 signatories to today's Joint Statement, the academic and industry attacks on the findings of the Mexican Government and U.S. university researchers has been orchestrated to keep the scandal from embarrassing the biotech industry as it tries to lift the European, Brazilian, and Mexican moratoria (de facto or otherwise) on genetically modified seeds or foods. If the Philippine meeting of the Genetic Resources Policy Committee of the CGIAR does not act decisively and immediately to protect farmers in Mesoamerica, civil society will take the issue directly to the April meeting of the Biodiversity Convention in the Hague, and the World Food Summit in Rome in June. (from ETC Newsletter)

The full text of the Joint Statement, and the complete list of 144 signatories, can be found at [www.etcgroup.org](http://www.etcgroup.org).

By [Christine Arncken](#)

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