

International Workshop on seed regime after 2003

ECO-PB organises an international workshop to discuss the issue of the new seed regime to come in the EU regulation on organic agriculture. As participants representatives of the organic agricultural sector as well as those of the seed sector have been invited. Additionally, representatives of national authorities and from the EU Commission have been requested to take part. The objective of this workshop, which shall take place on April the 11th and 12th in Frankfurt, is to facilitate an international discussion on this issue with key national players to exchange valuable information and concerns. It intends to establish common points of view on the organic seed regime in the organic sector on international level. The workshop will tie into discussions held and decisions made in the Article 14 Committee of the European Commission. The number of participants is restricted to invited experts.

By Klaus-Peter Wilbois

Proceedings of ECO-PB's symposium 2002 in Berlin

The Proceedings of ECO-PB's 1st international symposium "Organic seed production and plant breeding – strategies, problems and perspectives" is coming out on April 10th. The proceedings consist of the oral and poster presentations and a address list of participants. The editors are Edith Lammerts van Bueren and Klaus-Peter Wilbois. The proceedings costs 10 Euro including postage and can be ordered at info@eco-pb.org.

Short report Dutch Workshop on organic Seed and Planting Material "On the way to 2004" in Driebergen-NL, 24th January 2003.

Because there are so many questions about the Organic Seed Regime in Brussels and about the standpoints of the different actors, a workshop was organised by Biologica, Louis Bolk Institute, Stichting Zaadgoed and Plantum NL. The Dutch ministry is in favour of moving on with the planned expiration of the general derogation if things can be regulated properly. They are forming a working group with the different involved actors to plan and guide the necessary steps in the Netherlands. The farmers expressed their commitment in the need for further closing the food chain to be consistent, transparent and to gain credibility to the consumers. They are prepared to accept a more restricted assortment, but pleaded for more variety trials to come to the most adequate assortment of varieties in the next years. On one hand farmers, representing farmers unions, are convinced that one should not look what other (reluctant) countries do, but go for your own commitment. But others were afraid that if the Netherlands conducts a strict derogation regulation and farmers are forced to buy the expensive organic seeds, that they might lose their export position if other countries allow more easily the cheaper conventional seeds. Farmers pleaded for more international discussion and attuning.

There was of course discussion on the higher costs for organic propagation and thus on the raised seed prices and their consequences. An estimation of expected higher costs was presented by a trade company. Given the fact that commercial seed companies say that the prices of the biennial hybrid seeds of crops like onions will be three times as high, means that for farmers the costs per ha are 15,5% higher in the case of onions. Given a yield of 30 ton/ha this means an increase of costs per kg of 0.036 Euro. At the end of the chain it can mean an increase of 3% on the consumer price. Annual crops like tomatoes are less complicated to propagate and the increase of seed price is about 10 - 30%. For a greenhouse grower this can

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mean 0,5% increase of costs per m², and only 0,00625 Euro per kg tomato. If one counts with a consumer price of 2,50 Euro per kg than 0,25% increase is necessary to finance the higher costs. Not all actors were sure that this increase of prices will not effect the necessary market growth of the sector.

The seed companies expressed their need for clear regulations to be able to step into this market. Postponing the date for expiring the derogation for crops with, according the ESA inquiry, sufficient supply of varieties is commercial not interesting for them.

The participants realised that organic propagation is a first, necessary step towards an organic breeding for better adapted varieties in the future, and thus worthwhile going for. But all realised that this first step is a difficult one with still many obstacles to clear!

By Edith Lammerts van Bueren, Louis Bolk Institute

Availability of organic seed and seed potatoes in The Netherlands

In anticipation for the upcoming EU legislation on the compulsory use of organic seed and seed potatoes from 2004 on, the Dutch ministry of Agriculture has requested Plant Research International to characterize the situation in The Netherlands.

For this purpose, the required amounts of seed of the main organic crops were estimated from their acreage during the last three years. Plant breeding companies and seed traders were asked to give an estimation of their organic seed production for 2004. The information obtained from both sides has been matched with each other. It could be concluded that the supply of organic seed and seed potatoes will be sufficient for most of the agricultural and horticultural crops and grassland. Lucerne could give problems and the situation for clover is not clear. Information is lacking about the small crops since for those crops, organic seeds are not produced by the companies involved in the study.

For information, contact Anneke Balkema, Plant Research International, P.O.Box 16, 6700 AA Wageningen, The Netherlands.

Comparing Organic Spring Wheat VCU research with conventional variety research.

In 2001 Louis Bolk Institute and PPO-AGV in The Netherlands started Value for Cultivation and Use research for spring wheat according to an official organic research protocol. This VCU is compared with variety trials with the same set of varieties in a conventionally managed field (without using fungicides during the cropping season) Preliminary results show that testing under organic conditions with an organic research protocol makes a difference:

- The use of non chemically treated seeds in the organic VCU clearly influences the outcome in a year with bad germination conditions. Varieties with poor seed health show low germination rates, while germination is normal in plots with chemically treated seed. On the one hand one could argue that only seed lots of good quality should be used in variety testing. On the other hand for some varieties each year it is difficult to produce sufficient quantities of healthy (organic) seeds. Such varieties are unwanted for organic agriculture, but pass unnoticed in conventional variety trials.

- For organic farmers an earlier ground cover and a leafy variety are important to suppress weeds. These characteristics should be assessed in organic trials. In our conventional trials differences between varieties for vegetative development are small and difficult to observe, while in organic trials the differences between varieties are considerable and easy to observe.
- For susceptibility to leaf diseases the opposite is true. During the last two years in organic trials we found these diseases to appear later and develop slower than in conventional trials. In conventional trials it was easier to establish differences in susceptibility to yellow rust, brown rust and septoria leaf spot.
- For grain yield the ranking of the varieties is not exactly the same between the organic and conventional trials.

The Dutch commission which decides on admitting varieties on the Recommended List of Varieties has recognised the organic research protocol. Based on the preliminary results we are starting discussions on including a category of "varieties suitable for organic farming" in the Dutch Variety Lists. Meanwhile we have sown new spring wheat trials for the third year of this research.

For more information or for a copy of a progress report (in Dutch) contact [Aart Osman](#)

Research on Seed treatments and grading of spring wheat seeds to reduce fusarium infection

In the Netherlands fusarium (*Fusarium* spp, *Microdochium nivale*) causes serious problems in seed production of wheat. On average once every two years the organic seed harvest contains high amounts of fusarium and farmers find themselves purchasing seed lots with up to 25% of fusarium. In the Netherlands such seeds are traded with a recommendation for chemical seed treatment on the official seed label. To compensate for a reduced plant density organic seed traders recommend farmers to increase seed density. As the reduced seed quality is a regularly recurring problem, a group of farmers asked Louis Bolk Institute to start a research on the effect of using higher grades and different seed treatments (warm water, e-dressing and antagonists) on reducing fusarium infection in seeds. The trial has been sown this spring (2003) in an organic field and is supported by the Organic Farming Committee of the Experimental Farm "De Rusthoeve".

For more information or for a copy of a progress report (in Dutch) contact [Aart Osman](#)

Screening Spring Wheat Varieties for resistance to Fusarium

Little information is available on differences in resistance to Fusarium head blight and mycotoxin (DON) production in spring wheat varieties. In 2002, we inoculated the same 15 varieties, which were also tested in the Dutch organic VCU research (see above announcement in this newsletter), with spore suspensions of *Fusarium culmorum*. We found considerable differences between varieties in resistance to this disease. Four varieties showed a low infection rate. After harvest seeds were tested for the amount of DON. DON production correlated well with the observations of infection rate in the organic field (low infection in the field, low amount of DON in the grain). This experiment will be repeated in 2003 by Plant Research International in collaboration with Louis Bolk Institute and PPO-AGV.

For more information contact: [Olga Scholten](#)

7th April: Pan-Hellenic day for the propagation and the preservation of the traditional species

7th April has been arranged by "Peliti", the Pan-Hellenic day for the propagation and the preservation of the traditional species. We organize Festivals all over Greece with the participation of different Greek school and farmers. That they will hand out plants and seeds of traditional species to the other people. We invite you to join us in a big international festival this year on the 7th April.

For more information, please get in contact to: "Peliti", P/R of Paranesti, 66035 Paranesti, Greece