

Workshop in SUSVAR - a COST network supporting sustainable cereal production

The SUSVAR network (Sustainable low-input cereal production: required varietal characteristics and crop diversity) had its 5th workshop 3-7 July 2005 in Edinburgh, UK, with more than 70 participants. The theme of the workshop was 'Assessment of varietal characteristics in diverse crop and diverse low-input especially organic growing systems'. The program included plenum presentations and discussion on state of the art for composite crosses, variety mixtures, disease, nutrient uptake and weed assessment. Further, parallel sessions had presentations and discussion with the same topics as well as allelopathy, experimental design, cereal quality and participatory plant breeding. Finally, an excursion to two farms being part of the LEAF program (Linking Environment And Farming, www.leafuk.org) supporting environmentally sound agriculture in UK gave a good background for discussions about agriculture with focus on low input versus on high output.

The network is organised into six Working Groups, five focusing on specific research areas and one focusing on the practical application of the research results for variety testing: 1) plant genetics and plant breeding, 2) biostatistics, 3) plant nutrition and soil microbiology, 4) weed biology and plant competition, 5) plant pathology and plant disease resistance biology and 6) variety testing and certification. All the 6 Working Groups had planning meeting.

A handbook on assessment methods in low input and organic agriculture will be prepared and published next year as one of the outcomes of this workshop. For more information on this or other results look at the home page www.cost860.dk or contact one of the working group leaders or the chairperson..

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Dutch parliament wants GM free seed

In June the Dutch parliament debated about co-existence. One of the subjects was the GM seed threshold. Almost all political parties demanded that the seed threshold should be set at detection limit (0,1%) in order to ensure co-existence between GM and GM free crops. A resolution on this matter was accepted by a large majority of the parliament. The Minister of Agriculture Cees Veerman promised he would strive for 0,1% in Europe. This is a clear change of position since the Netherlands so far supported the position of the European Commission (between 0,3 and 0,5%).

Further information: Maaïke Raaijmakers from Biologica at 0032-30-233 99 85

Non-genetically modified varieties need land – Organic Seed fund celebrate its ten year anniversary

Seed fund is ten years old! In 1995 a married couple laid the foundation stones with 70.000 DM. The same amount was contributed by the GTS trusteeship, an umbrella organisation for social, ecological and ethical initiatives. Since then the seed fund can thank 850 annual donors, 22 vegetable, and six grain projects for approximately €300.000 in support. The result is a great diversity of varieties with good flavour and high nutritional value. The cultivation initiative has

received a number of awards, most recently the market garden Piluweri has won first prize in "Sponsorship for Organic Farmland".

Success is, however, no reason to sit back. News that agro-chemical company Monsanto has bought the seed cultivation company Seminis, one of the biggest worldwide vegetable seed cultivators, for 1.4 billion US dollars gives reason for concern. Whoever controls seeds certainly controls what we, our children and our grandchildren eat! Monsanto is responsible for over 90% of the worlds genetically modified plant cultivation. The increasing market power of fewer and fewer companies shows how necessary the development and expansion of independent organic cultivation is for the future.

For the most recent information about the seed fund and for the newly designed information sheet please contact Oliver Willing, ph: +49-0234-5797141

New reports concerning organic seed production and plant breeding on the ECO-PB Web Site

There are several new reports put on the ECO-PB Web Site to be looked up:

- Organic Seed Production and Plant Breeding – strategies, problems and perspectives is the title of the report from the ECO-PB Berlin Symposium 2002 which is now available as pdf-Download for free (http://www.eco-pb.org/09/proceedings_berlin_symposium.pdf).
- Report of the Workshop on Organic Breeding Strategies and the Use of Molecular Markers, 17-19 January 2005, Driebergen-The Netherlands (http://www.eco-pb.org/09/7617_01048.pdf).
- Report about importance and acceptance of hybrid varieties in cereals by Christine Arncken (German only): Hybridsorten im Bio-Getreide? Perspektiven und Akzeptanz der Hybridzüchtung für den Bio-Anbau (http://www.eco-pb.org/09/arncken_hybridbericht.pdf).
- Organic Seed Propagation: Current status and problems in Europe. Environmental friendly food production system: Requirements for plant breeding and seed production 6th Framework Program FP-2003-SSA-1-007003 ENVIRFOOD May 31-June 3, 2005 TALSI, LATVIA by Zinta Gaile, zinta@apollo.lv Latvia University of Agriculture (http://www.eco-pb.org/09/envirfood_organicseedpropagation.pdf).
- Organic Plant Breeding: Current status and problems in Europe. ENVIRFOOD May 31-June 3, 2005 TALSI, LATVIA Linda Legzina, lindaleg@navigator.lv and Ilze Skrabule, skrabuleilze@navigator.lv Priekuli Plant Breeding station, LATVIA (http://www.eco-pb.org/09/envirfood_organicplantbreeding.pdf).
- Variety Testing for Organic Farming: Current status and problems in Europe. ENVIRFOOD May 31-June 3, 2005 TALSI, LATVIA by Ina Belicka and Mara Bleidere, State Stende Plant Breeding station, stende.selekcija@apollo.lv (http://www.eco-pb.org/09/envirfood_organicvarietytesting.pdf).

Information on organic fruit plants grafted with alternative rootstocks

Francois WARLOP of GRAB (Groupe de Recherche en Agriculture Biologique) in France is looking for results of and international experiences with organic fruit plants grafted with alternative rootstocks, behaviour of these plants under organic management, and susceptibility to rodents, soil-borne pathogens, diseases and pests.

For any information or idea concerning this topic contact: Francois WARLOP GRAB