

EU legislation: Petition on the draft directive on GMO contamination in seeds

The EU Commission presented a regulation on GMO contamination of seeds (see march Newsletter). According to this draft non-GMO (=conventional) varieties of e.g. maize, rape, soybean, tomato, and potato may contain up to 0.3 or 0.7 % of GMOs without being labelled. Up to now, seeds in Europe are more or less GMO free.

The German foundation "Zukunftsstiftung Landwirtschaft", prepared a final position paper concerning the draft and is asking to support its political petition. For further information and signing the petition contact: <http://www.zs-l.de/gmo/petition.htm>

by Christine Arncken

EU legislation: IFOAM EU Group expresses concern on the draft directive on accidental or adventitious presence of GM seeds in seed lots of non- genetically modified plant varieties

In a letter to the EU Commission the IFOAM EU Group expressed its concerns about the proposed directive that does not make any reference to the requirements for organic production systems which in turn is in a rapid growth in European countries and does not allow GMOs. The IFOAM EU Group points out that the approach to set a 1%-threshold level for labelling misses logical foundation. On the contrary to the proposal, the IFOAM EU Group proposes an alternative approach that starts from the standpoint of avoiding contamination instead of taking a threshold contamination level. Furthermore, the EU Group raises concerns about the sources on which the Scientific Commission on Plants has derived its threshold levels for seeds, since these are unpublished and can therefore not be readily validated.

By Klaus-Peter Wilbois

EU Legislation: New regime on the use of organically multiplied seed

The EU commission is going straight ahead with the formulation of the regime on the use of organic seed after the derogation period expiring on 31 December 2003. A first draft regulation has been circulated (working No: AGR/02/61449.rev1) in the EU member states. In the official language the regulation is 'laying down rules for the application of the derogation with regard to the use of seeds and vegetative propagating material provided for in council regulation (EEC) No 2092/91 on organic production of agricultural products and indications referring thereto on agricultural products and foodstuffs.'

The draft indicates that it is not yet time to propose a strict regime on vegetative reproductive materials. But for seed and seedpotatoes the new proposal shall be applicable. Core of the new regime is a database that should list all the available organically multiplied species. However, the commission proposes that this database should be managed by the Member States. The seed sector and the organic farming movement worry about the load of bureaucracy, that could be avoided when only one mandatory database is installed. The organic sector offers its model OrganicXseeds for this purpose. The EU commission expects the regulation to be finished before the end of this year.

Louise Luttkholt, Platform Biologica, Netherlands

European network of Demeter seed traders intensifies cooperation

In Echzell-Bingenheim, Germany, five Demeter seed traders from five European countries met on April 26th and 27th. The participants are working together to supply organic agriculture with high quality seed and appropriate varieties (of vegetables, herbs and flowers). They are now intensifying cooperation

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regarding quality management systems and exchange on varieties and seed quantities. "These measures shall strengthen the network on the whole and the partners in the individual countries", says Gebhard Rossmann, chair of Bingenheimer Saatgut AG.

The seed traders agree that organic seed must mean more than just being reproduced during one generation under organic conditions. Only multiplication over many generations as well as maintenance breeding under organic conditions could give the prerequisite for consequent organic seed production, finally also leading to organic plant breeding.

The initiatives are already offering more than 600 varieties of vegetables, herbs and flowers and are together spreading 62 000 catalogues in the whole of Europe.

For more information and a photograph of responsible persons please contact Petra Boie, Bingenheimer Saatgut AG (Deutschland) Tel. + 49 (0) 6035/ 1899 –12.

Translation: Christine Arncken

Germany: official workshop on breeding for organic agriculture in June

In Germany, the federal ministry for consumer protection, nutrition and agriculture (BMVEL) engaged the federal office for variety tests and admissions (Bundessortenamt) to organize a workshop on breeding for organic agriculture. The workshop will take place on June 10th and 11th in Hannover. Representatives of all organic label organizations, of FiBL, of different (conventional) breeders' organizations, of public research institutions, of a nature conservation organization (NABU) and of the foundation "Zukunftsstiftung Landwirtschaft" are invited to discuss the federal programme on organic farming, variety testing conditions, principles of organic farming, requirements on breeding for organic farming, breeding goals and methods. Part of the workshop will be in separate groups for cereals, potato, oil and protein crops, forage crops including maize, and vegetables, medical plants and herbs. Coordinator: Dr. Steinberger, Bundessortenamt, Postfach 61 04 40, D-30604 Hannover, <http://www.bundessortenamt.de>.

By Christine Arncken

Germany: New Darzau project on barley loose smut resistance financed by BMVEL

In the cereal breeding and research station Darzau now a project started about the evaluation of the German official spring barley collection with regard to its susceptibility to loose smut under natural and artificial infection. Additional different origins of loose smut from Germany and neighbour countries are tested on a set of genetic resources with different described resistances. In organic farming loose smut can only be suppressed by hot water treatment and early planting. Resistant varieties would be a good source for multiplication under organic farming and for breeding new varieties for organic farming. The project is supported by the German Federal Ministry of Consumer Protection, Food and Agriculture. More about the project: www.darzau.de/en/projects/barley_loose_smut.htm

By Karl-Joseph Müller

Germany: Poster exhibition and guided tours through trials and breeding plots at Dottenfelder Hof

At Dottenfelder Hof in Bad Vilbel near Frankfurt, biodynamic research and breeding is presented to the public on Sat, May 25th and Sun, May 26th from 10.00 to 17.00. Vegetable breeding is demonstrated for cabbage, carrot, turnip, tomato, cucumber and more. Cereal breeding is demonstrated for winter rye, winter and spring wheat, winter barley. Seed health topics are common bunt (*Tilletia caries*) in wheat and

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loose smut (*Ustilago nuda*) in barley.

A plan how to reach Dottenfelder Hof can be found under www.dottenfelderhof.de
Contact and Information: Dr. Hartmut Spiess, Tel. +49/6101/6385, spiess@ibdf.de

Translation: Christine Arncken

Germany: Federal Ministry of Consumer Protection, Food and Agriculture strengthens efforts to conserve and sustainable utilize biological diversity – Information Centre for Biological Diversity established

Following the reorientation of agricultural policy and in line with the setting of priorities within its purview the Federal Ministry of Consumer Protection, Food and Agriculture (BMVEL) has established an Information Centre for Biological Diversity (IBV), located in the German Centre for Documentation and Information in Agriculture (ZADI) in Bonn. The IBV succeeds the former Information Centre for Genetic Resources (IGR). While the IGR focussed on the conservation of genetic resources, the new Information Centre for Biological Diversity will increasingly support efforts to conserve biological diversity.

The Federal Government aims at orienting agricultural production more than so far towards the economic, social and ecological principles of sustainability. In the process agriculture, forestry and fisheries are to contribute to a greater extent to conserving the cultural landscape diversity and the biological diversity, including its natural resources. Significant success has been achieved in reducing abiotic environmental stresses, however, biodiversity continues to decrease. This development must be stopped.

Nature conservation must make valuable contributions. However, those who manage farm and forest land and utilize the biological resources in agriculture, forestry and fishery have to bear a special responsibility. Thus, the Federal Ministry of Consumer Protection, Food and Agriculture is committed to improving measures for the conservation of biological diversity and the diversity of landscape structures in agriculture and forestry. In this respect, in addition to supporting organic farming, it is of particular importance to maintain diverse crop rotation systems, the conservation and sustainable development of regional crop varieties and farm animal breeds, and the conservation and sustainable utilization of wild plants and animals used for food purposes.

The Information Centre for Biological Diversity (IBV) will be the central information facility to support efforts made by science and research, industry, administration and the public, taking advantage of synergy effects and increasing the efficiency of measures in the field of biodiversity. The objectives of the IBV are, inter alia, the collection, documentation and dissemination of information at the national, EU and international levels, as well as giving advice and coordinating activities at the technical and administrative levels within the framework of national, EU and international measures and programmes.

The German Centre for Documentation and Information in Agriculture (ZADI) is the central scientific information institute of the Federal Ministry of Consumer Protection, Food and Agriculture (BMVEL). Among its tasks are information services like the development and maintenance of information portals, technical information systems and databases, giving advice to the institutes within the purview of the Ministry as well as fulfilling national coordination tasks.

Press release of the German Federal Ministry of Consumer Protection, Food and Agriculture on the establishment of the Information Centre for Biological Diversity; <http://www.zadi.de/ibv/en/>

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Netherlands: Results of first year of official VCU trials in the Netherlands with spring wheat 2001 available

The results of the official trials on value for cultivation and use (VCU) under organic conditions for spring wheat can be read in an article with a table on the ECO-PB Homepage. The article was first published in Dutch in De Boerderij, 87(2002): 30-31.

Information: Aart Osman, Louis Bolk Institute, Hoofdstraat 24, NL-3972 LA Driebergen.

ECO-PB Homepage: Discussion paper on ecological cereal breeding and genetic engineering

The discussion paper on ecological cereal breeding and genetic engineering by Christine Karutz (1998) is now available on the ECO-PB homepage. See publications / concept papers.

ECO-PB Homepage: Dossier on plant breeding techniques

The FiBL Dossier on plant breeding techniques is now made available on the ECO-PB web site. See publications / concept papers.

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