

International Workshop on seed regime after 2003

ECO-PB had organised 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 present. Additionally, representatives of national authorities and from the EU Commission took part. The objective of the workshop, which took place on April the 11th and 12th in Frankfurt, was to facilitate an international discussion on this issue with key national players to exchange valuable information and concerns. It intended to establish common points of view on the organic seed regime in the organic sector on international level. The report is now available on the ECO-PB Web Site under <http://www.eco-pb.org/09/rp.htm> Meanwhile, in the meeting of Mai 23, the new EU Organic Seed Regulation has been approved by the Member States. It shall enter into force on the twentieth day following that of its publication in the Official Journal of the European Union and will apply from 1 January 2004.

By Klaus-Peter Wilbois

Proceedings of ECO-PB's symposium 2002 in Berlin now available for order

The Proceedings of ECO-PB's 1rst international symposium "Organic seed production and plant breeding – strategies, problems and perspectives" are now available. 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 nicely made brochure with the proceedings cost 10 Euro including postage (within the EU) and can be ordered under <http://www.eco-pb.org/09/rp.htm>.

Organic Seed regime after 2004 in the Netherlands

It sounds so simple: a database with information about the availability of organically produced seed and seed potatoes. The ECO-PB meeting in Frankfurt showed clearly that the creation of a well operating database requires a time-consuming preparation process. If a Member State does not have a functionally database on January 1, 2004, derogations cannot be granted. The need for action on short term is clear.

In the Netherlands two projects were assigned:

- 1) Implementation of an operational database
- 2) The procedure for granting derogations

The first project has already started, the second project starts in June. Regarding the database, there are two options. One option is to link to organicXseeds, the other option is to expand an existing Dutch database which contains all species that can be traded legally. The database project wants to involve all users of the database (Dutch seed companies, farmers, control bodies) in the decision making process. Criteria and wishes concerning the database will be formulated in co-operation with all actors. In July the Dutch government will make a decision, taking into account the preferences of the different actors, the legal aspects and the costs.

By Andrea Almasi, Expertisecentrum LNV, Bennekomseweg 41, Postbus 4826710, BL EDE
phone: 0318-822804

Organic Seed regime after 2004 – the Process in Belgium

After the workshop in Frankfurt organised by ECO-PB, the Flemish region of Belgium was very impressed by the development in countries as the UK, Denmark and of course Switzerland.

The organic sector and the Flemish authorities agreed that there has to come an action plan to realise a database before the end of this year. A proposal for the action plan will be published by the end of June following by a public call for project proposals from private bodies. The project has to start in September at the latest.

The Flemish authorities have to agree on the action plan with the authorities of Wallonië, so that we can make one database for Belgium. When the contact between the two regions is settled they will contact the Netherlands and the other countries which plan to work with the revised database 'organicXseeds' of FiBL. They hope to receive a proposal from FiBL soon to use this database as a mother database.

By Marcel de Jong, advisor of BLIVO

VI Jornadas de SEAE (Sociedad Española de Agricultura Ecológica): Genetic Resources and Seeds in Organic Agriculture

From 15 to 17 May 2003 the SEAE held a conference near the town of Murcia (the Region of Murcia, near Alicante, is in one of the most important vegetable growing areas of Spain, with hundreds of ha of greenhouse production). Up to 150 persons gathered the meeting, a mixture of organic farmers, delegates of farmers cooperatives, representatives of the department of agriculture and of the seed companies as well as some students. The seminar was very well organised and we heard some interesting presentations. There were three main topics on this conference: genetic resources, organic seeds and agricultural projects dealing with seed production and breeding in developing countries.

Lively discussions soon showed, that two main blocks dominated the audience. One block were farmers grouped around the organisation Red de Semillas (=seed network), which is a loose cooperative that cultivates traditional varieties and produces seed for exchange and commerce on small scale. They voted very strong for the rights to use their conservation varieties. Another part of the audience were representatives of farms producing organic vegetables for export to northern countries. They would like to know, which seed they will be allowed to use next year. Unhappily, no one did answer their question, since the future situation of the Organic Seed Regulation in Spain is still quite confused. Furthermore, the discussion was blocked by Red de Semillas because they are totally against any new seed regulation. Red de Semillas fears, that Spain will be invaded with organic seeds from northern countries, while their traditional varieties are not anymore allowed to be commercialised. Thus ignoring the facts, that the new Regulation allows derogation for the use of conservation varieties and that Spain is one of the most important markets for vegetable seeds of "northern" companies since many years. But, according to representatives of the seed companies who attended the meeting, they are selling nearly no organic seeds to their organic clientele in Spain. This fact should change next year dramatically. But the whole seminar and the statements given by Spanish authorities did not give much hope on a very strict implementation of the respective EU Regulation. This is alarming since e.g. Swiss farmers fear most to face disadvantages by imported products from countries which do not force their farmers to the use of - compared to conventional seeds - more expensive organic propagation material. At least there was a slight hope in the end of the

conference, since everyone agreed, that there is still much work to do on organic seeds in Spain. That's for sure!

By Andreas Thommen

Proposal for a new COST Action: "Improving quality of plant propagation material in support of organic farming"

Wageningen Seed Centre (WSC) has taken the initiative to initiate a proposal for a COST action on organic plant propagation material (seeds, tuber, bulbs, cuttings, etc.). More information on this initiative you can find though the WSC site: www.seedcentre.nl.

The initiative has been discussed at the ECO-PB Symposium in November 2002 in Berlin, and in a follow-up a text has been prepared in collaboration with researchers from the Danish Institute of Agricultural Science. Many researchers have expressed their interest for the proposed COST Action and the proposal has been submitted early May 2003.

You can find the text of the proposal on our web site. If you are interested in the Action and you perform research that might contribute to the Action, please fill in the inventory of ongoing projects through the web site. An example is added in the file. If the Action is granted, this inventory will form a first basis for contacting researchers that will become active in the Action if granted. Information on the COST programme can be obtained from the COST web site: <http://cost.cordis.lu/src/home.cfm>

For more information, don't hesitate to contact the co-ordinator of the proposal: Steven Groot: Wageningen Seed centre, Plant Research International, Wageningen University and Research Centre, phone: +31 317 476 975

Proposal for a new COST Action: "Varietal characteristics and crop diversity for low-input cereal production"

Ideas for a COST Action focusing on varieties and diversity was developed during autumn 2002 and discussed at the ECO-PB meeting in November 2002. In January 2003 a proposal for a new COST Action entitled "Varietal characteristics and crop diversity for low-input cereal production" was submitted to the COST Technical Committee of Agriculture and Biotechnology (more information on COST see <http://cost.cordis.lu/src/home.cfm>). It has now been evaluated and a resubmission was suggested in which the objects are focused and which include more expertise from more countries. If you are interested in establishing methods for selecting varieties, lines and populations, and in developing ways to increase and make use of crop diversity and genotype-environment interactions to ensure stable and acceptable yields of good-quality cereal crops for low-input, especially organic production in Europe, please, look at my web site http://www.risoe.dk/pbk/staff_uk/haqs.htm where you can find the first version of the proposal. In the Appendix A you will find a list of on-going field trials and other experimental activities related to the Action. Please, send me a message with this type of information and you will be included in the process of describing the revised version of the proposal.

For more information, don't hesitate to contact the co-ordinator of the proposal: Hanne Østergård, Plant Research Department, Risø National Laboratory, Denmark, phone: +45 4677 4111

Production and disposal of organic grass and clover seed

Since 1992 an organic production of grass and clover seed for forage mixtures has gradually been established in Denmark. A recent survey by the Danish Seed Council concludes that organic grass seed are now available in grass species which are the main constituents of high quality forage mixtures such as perennial ryegrass, hybrid ryegrass, meadow fescue, timothy, red fescue and smooth stalked meadow grass. In these species the quantity of seed available by far exceeds the demand for the Danish home market. Organic grass seed production is mainly localised in production systems with a low weed pressure and where there is access to animal manure. However, organic seed of a main constituent in forage mixtures, white clover, is still in request. The production covers only 50% of the Danish demand. Yields in white clover seed production are considerably lower than in conventional cropping systems, due to weeds and pests.

By Birte Boelt, Department of Plant Biology, Danish Institute of Agricultural Sciences

Germany discusses official organic VCU testing

In a workshop held on 14th and 15th of May 2003 at the Bundessortenamt in Hanover, experts came together in order to discuss necessary steps towards an organic VCU testing of varieties which shall be introduced in the market. Of special interest were the reports given by experts from Austria, Switzerland and the Netherlands which made already use of official VCU testing. Amongst the participants it was considered necessary in Germany to also introduce an organic VCU testing together with further criteria for cereal crops and to initially establish as a project organic testing for potatoes.

By Klaus-Peter Wilbois

Pre-announcement of 1st European Conference on the Co-existence of Genetically Modified Crops with Conventional and Organic Crops

The 1st European Conference on the Co-existence of Genetically Modified Crops with Conventional and Organic Crops will take place from the 13th to 14th of November 2003 in Helsingør, Denmark. Organizer is DIAS – the Danish Institute of Agricultural Sciences (www.agrsci.dk). The event is supported by the Danish Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries. A summary of a report on the co-existence of genetically modified crops with conventional and organic crops is available under <http://www.fvm.dk/file/Summary.pdf>.

By Birte Boelt, Department of Plant Biology, Danish Institute of Agricultural Sciences