EU-Regulation on Conservation Varieties

There is progress on the Commission Directive establishing the specific conditions under which seed and propagating material of agricultural and vegetable plants may be marketed in relation to the conservation in situ and the sustainable use of plant genetic resources through growing and marketing. The most recent meeting was held in Brussels on 22 and 23 November 2005. The next meeting is planned for spring 2006 in Brussels. With thanks to Karl-Josef Mueller (Darzau-D) ECO-PB has sent a letter to the commission to support a letter that IFOAM EU Regional Group had sent in the summer of 2005, and added comments on several additional issues. ECO-PB stressed that in-situ conservation of varieties implies *allowing evolution* under current cultural environments. This is one of the most important aspects of in-situ conservation compared to ex-situ conservation. Because of site influenced evolution/selection the populations stay in development and stability can not be guaranteed. Therefore the reference sample for the designated authority should be *replaced every 5 ye*ars, and it is *not uniformity but identifiability* of a "new genetic resource" which should be required. This could be done by modern fingerprinting or classical detection of frequencies of selected characters in a population. ECO-PB's expectation of this regulation on conservation varieties is that it will reduce, and not enlarge obstacles given by present regulations, for private initiatives for sustainable use of genetic resources. *Uniformity is yet protected, but diversity has to be protected and first of all allowed.* For instance, because most interesting "conservation varieties" can only be restored from gene banks, it makes *no sense to restrict 'the region of maintaining' (Ad II.6.) to 'the region of origin'*. In the view of ECO-PB the most important factor for a successful growing of "genetic resources", including development of new adapted characters for later use for commercial plant breeding, are the skills of the maintainer and his/her interest and enthusiasm.

More information: Edith Lammerts van Bueren

First announcement of ECO-PB 2006 Workshop on participatory plant breeding

ECO-PB together with Dominique Desclaux (INRA) is organising a workshop on Participatory Plant Breeding on June 11-13, 2006 in La Besse, in the south-west of France.

The aim is to discuss examples of participatory plant breeding or selection activities in the field of organic agriculture in industrialised countries, but also on training of farmers for seed saving, seed production or selection activities. There will be oral presentations and a poster session. Abstracts of max 300 words should be sent in before March 1, 2006. The ECO-PB workshop will be partly combined with the COST 860 SUSVAR workshop on cereal crop diversity at the same location from 12-14 June, 2006.

Further information will be soon given on the ECO-PB and COST 860 SUSVAR web site.

SUSVAR Workshop on cereal crop diversity

'SUSVAR Workshop on cereal crop diversity: Implications for production and products' is the title of the workshop to be held in La Besse, South West France from 12 - 15 June 2006. The Workshop will be linked to SUSVAR WG and MC meetings, and ECO-PB workshop on Participatory Plant Breeding 11-13 June 2006. The aim of the joint workshop for members of SUSVAR WG's and others interested is to deal with diverse cereal crops (variety mixtures, composite crosses and intercropping) and their characteristics with regard to production,

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agricultural and quality traits. Also potential collaboration with breeders, farmers and consumers will be dealt with. All participants are asked to bring a poster in relation to the topic, and invited speakers will give more general presentations. Deadline for registration: Registration will be possible at this site mid-January 2006. Deadline will be March 6th 2006 for people to be reimbursed by SUSVAR and May 1st for others. The number of participants will be limited to about 60. Eligible for reimbursement are 1 MC member or substitute from each member country, invited speakers and members of SUSVAR presenting a poster.

The Deadline for submission of Abstracts for the proceeding is June the 1st. Abstracts of 1 to 4 pages are welcome.

For further information see COST 860 SUSVAR, contact the local organizers: Max Haefliger and Dominique Desclaux or the scientific organizer: Hanne Østergård

ECO-PB successfully carried out third workshop on the organic seed regime in the EU

The third workshop on the organic seed regime in the EU was held on 4 November in Vienna. The workshop has been organised by the European Consortium for Organic Plant Breeding (ECO-PB) and was supported by IFOAM EU Regional Group. 26 experts from 13 different European countries took part.

Besides presentations of key note speakers with respect to the state of the art regarding the implementation of organic seed regime in the different Member States of the European Union and comprehensive aspects on organic seed use and trade there were thorough discussion of crucial points in the development of organic seed use.

As a result there were measures agreed amongst the participants to work on different levels towards a higher of organic seed proportions in organic agriculture. The full report as well as a copy of the presentations will soon be published on the ECO-PB web site Publications /Reports and Proceedings.

For more information see ECO-PB Web site or contact Klaus-Peter Wilbois

Participatory Plant Breeding for Organic Farming in Brittany

The availability of organic seeds is a great problem for organic farmers. The private sector of plant breeding meets difficulties to answer to the organic farming (OF) demand, characterized by small quantities and a great diversity of criteria and by breeding methods which respect the natural species characteristics (see IFOAM Draft Standard on organic seeds and plant breeding). So, the organic sector is organizing breeding and seed production by itself

In France, since 2001, a Brittany regional organic umbrella (IBB, Inter Bio Bretagne), and some researchers from the national institute for agronomical research (INRA) have initiated a breeding program for organic production and a participatory plant breeding (PPB) program for organic cabbages and cauliflowers in Brittany, from the evaluation of genetic resources of several European gene Banks. In the PPB, the farmers are taking in charge breeding and seed production of open pollinated varieties. Several types were kept and bred, depending on the way of production and commercialization for each farmer. In the northern Brittany, farmers have not forgotten the traditional production of cauliflower seeds. PAIS, the agrobiological experimental

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station of IBB on the organic site of an agricultural school (Suscinio, Morlaix), is the meeting point for all the involved actors (farmers, traders, trainers, researchers…). There, the farmers and traders can find technical and scientific information, and they can share their experiences from the plant selection to seed production.

Today, other French PPB initiatives involve several species and organic farmers groups, to promote biodiversity and a best adaptation to a local production: *durum wheat* in the Mediterranean area, *bread wheat* with the "paysan-boulangers", *maize and sunflower* in the South-West of the country, *tomato* in the South-East, *radishes, parsnip and summer cauliflower*, in Pays de Loire.

From these experiences, the PPB for organic farming consists in the constitution of the organic farmers group with the creation of exchange space for researchers and others organic actors, the definition of the priority in matters of crops, the discovering and selection of genetic resources in the farmers fields, the exchange of experiences and genetic resources through formal and informal, regional, national or international, farmer and organic professional meetings (accompanied by researchers and often enlarged to gardeners and trainers).

The seed distribution has been depending on the French legislative evolution. By nature, the varieties issued from PPB could not fill the DUS (Distinction, Uniformity, Stability) characteristics for registration. And mainly, by ethics, the organic way of development should enhance the ancestral link between the plant and the farmers, link which needs exchanges to allow the evolution of the crops and the conservation of a living biodiversity.

By Véronique Chable INRA-SAD Armorique, 65 rue de Saint-Brieuc, CS 84215, F- 35042 Rennes Cedex France and François Le Lagadec IBB (Inter Bio Bretagne), 33, Avenue Winston Churchill, BP 71612, F-35016 Rennes Cedex - France

French website on participatory plant breeding

Plant breeders of INRA involved in organic agriculture and CIRAD work together on research programmes for participatory breeding. They are also linked through a common website: http://selection-participative.cirad.fr

More information: Dominique Desclaux

Information campaign for OP-varieties in Denmark

On the 13th of December a successful seminar concerning "breeding techniques and organic ethic" was held in Billund in Denmark with farmers, advisors, traders, scientists and organisation employees as participants. The seminar was arranged by the project "Focus on fertile seeds" at the Association for Biodynamic Agriculture in cooperation with the agriculture association Organic Denmark (OD). Professor Edith Lammerts van Bueren from Wageningen University, director Gebhard Rossmanith from Bingenheimer Saatgut AG and Nordic sales manager Thomas Sørensen from Enza Zaden/Vitalis were the main speakers. Edith Lammerts van Bueren made clear that many biotech based breeding techniques do not respect the organic ethic for treating living organisms.

The seminar marked the increase in interest for the subject in Denmark during the project campaign period of 18 months – from a niche subject in the biodynamic movement to a general acceptance in the organic movement that the breeding techniques of seeds is a very important issue to discuss and take action on for the organic agriculture. The OD will now integrate the issue in its work concerning breeding techniques. The Association for Biodynamic Agriculture hope that OD will soon follow the international Demeter standards and ban the use of seeds of cell fusion techniques in organic agriculture and support the development of more and better fertile seeds of OP-varieties.

By Klaus Loehr-Petersen, Project leader, Association for Biodynamic Agriculture in Denmark
Website in Danish: www.frugtbare-froe.dk

Organic plant breeding in US

Here has been an interesting conference in the US on September 11-14, 2005, in Ames-Iowa, organised by Michael Sligh/RAFI and Walter Goldstein/Michael Fields Institute, see http://www.agron.iastate.edu/seedsandbreeds. This 2005 Seeds and Breeds conference was focussed on 'reinvigorating public breeding of seeds and animals for a healthy 21rst century agriculture'. Among the participants were many researcher breeders from US Landgrant universities with public breeding programmes involved in organic agriculture and many delegates from organic seed saving initiatives in the US. It was the second conference on this topic. The proceedings of the first conference can be downloaded from: www.rafiusa.org.

Edith Lammerts van Bueren was invited speaker to give an overview of the animal and plant breeding initiatives in Europe.

More information: Michael Sligh

Forschungsring puts negative list in the internet and informs about vegetable varieties which have been bred using cell fusion techniques

The resolution of the 'Forschungsring für Biologisch-Dynamische Wirtschaftsweise' (FR), to exclude varieties which haven been bred using protoplast or cytoplast fusion for Demeter vegetable grower, lead now to the publication of a negative list. With that, "our effort to prevent 'small genetic engineering' in plant breeding and to replace hybrids by non-hybrid varieties is continued" stresses Dr Jochen Leopold, managing director of FR in Darmstadt. The approach to persuade vegetable breeders to mark those varieties in the data base OrganicXseeds which have been produced by means of cell fusion techniques has not been successful. Therefore a positive list as used up to now would no longer be possible. "We very much regret this lack of co-operation and see ourselves now forced to announce the well-known varieties emerged from cell fusion technology in the internet such that all Demeter producer can decide, which seeds she or he orders or not" says Leopold. He now hops that this initiative of the Forschungsring will lead to a better supply of varieties which have been bred especially for the use by organic vegetable growers.

For more information see www.forschungsring.de / Aktuelles.

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Does plant breeding need a conception of man – approaches to bio-dynamic plant-breeding

is the title of the Conference of the Foundation for Future Farming in which vegetable and cereal breeders will present their ideas and breeding approaches and will allow a look at their every day's work. Lectures, talks and discussion forums will give an insight into the development of new varieties and the varied work in breeding gardens. The congress is open to everyone from gardening, farming, trade, processing, science as well as the general interested public.

As speakers are invited: Brigitte von Wistinghausen, (vegetable breeder), Dr. Karl-Josef Müller, (cereal breeder), Dr. Uwe Momsen, (paediatrician), Martin Hollerbach, (health food dealer), Dorian Schmidt, (quality researcher), Michael Kassner, (nutritionist), Martina Geith, Christina Henatsch, Thomas Heinze und Dieter Bauer (vegetable breeders).

The workshop is takting place on Saturday, January the 28th, 2006, 10.00 a.m. until 5.00 p.m. in the Anthroposophical Centre Kassel, Wilhelmshöher Allee 261, D-34131 Kassel (5 minutes walk from Kassel ICE station). Participation fee is € 30,- (incl. lunch). Registration before 20 January 2005.

For more information contact: Oliver Willing, Foundation for Future Farming - Zukunftsstiftung Landwirtschaft, phone Tel. ++49 - 234/5797 - 141, Fax - 188,

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