Issue Sept. – Nov. 2006 NEWSLETTER ON ORGANIC SEEDS AND PLANT BREEDING

International workshop on different models to finance plant breeding

ECO-PB is going to hold an international workshop on ways and models to finance plant breeding especially for organic farming. The workshop is going to take place on Tuesday, 27 February 2007 in Frankfurt am Main, Germany. The location for the workshop is the Ökohaus KA Eins in Frankfurt which is conveniently situated for public transport. The one-day workshop starts at 9.30 and lasts to 16.30 and is carried out in English.

In the workshop different examples and models of financing plant breeding activities are presented and discussed amongst participants. The goal of this workshop is to stimulate the development and progress of alternative ways of dividing breeding costs over the different stakeholders in the food production chain.

About 50 persons (farmers, breeders, traders, processors and policy makers) involved in the topic will be invited to workshop. To create an environment for an open and fruitful discussion the maximum number of participants will be restricted to 50. People interested in participating shall send an e-mail to the address below, with a short summary of current activities in this area and the motivation for participating.

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Successful international meeting on the use of organic seeds in vegetable production

ECO-PB together with the Danish Agricultural Advisory Service, National Centre and the Organic Revision Project held its forth workshop on the European organic seed attached to Bejo's 'open days' in Warmenhuizen/ The Netherlands. The organizers considered it worthwhile to arrange this joint meeting for growers, scientists, advisors and representatives from the official bodies/departments administering the rules in the individual countries to ensure that there is compliance with the rules in the individual European countries. Some 70 participants from 13 different countries took part in the workshop and made the work and discussion fruitful.

Short report and the presentations given during the workshop: http://www.eco-pb.org/09/rp.htm

First announcement on the conference 'Plant Breeding for organic and low-input farming systems: dealing with genotype-environment interaction'

The Eucarpia Working Group Organic Plant breeding will hold a conference in Wageningen, The Netherlands on November 7 - 9, 2007 on Plant Breeding for organic and low-input farming systems with special emphasis on how to deal with genotype-environment interaction. This conference will be jointly organized by COST SUSVAR: WP1 genetics, ECO-PB and the Graduate School Production Ecology & Resource Conservation (PE&RC) of the Wageningen University.

There will be a call for papers for oral and poster presentations. At the start of the conference an abstract book will be presented. Instead of a proceedings the editors of Euphytica, a peer-reviewed journal on plant breeding, has offered the possibility to release a special issue on the theme of this workshop and to publish 10-15 selected (peer –reviewed) papers in this issue. More information will be available on the Eucarpia and ECO-PB website by the end of November 2006.

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Dutch expert group on vegetables advices onion on the national annex

Already for some years there has been a debate among the Dutch organic onion growers about the appropriateness of the assortment of organically propagated varieties. Another important argument not to have onion on the national annex was the high price of organic seed (2-3 times conventional seed) and the unfair competition on the expert market with countries that allow derogations for (cheaper) conventional onion seeds. On top of that farmers received a price for their onions which was far below the cost price. By using organic seed the cost price would increase with another 10-30% without any guarantee for a higher selling price. As a consequence of the low prices, overproduction and the risk of severe downy mildew infections the area of Dutch organic onions has been halved in 2006.
This year the issue of the annex was on the agenda of the expert group again. There are now 16 modern onion varieties available for 2007 and the prices for onions are expected to be better. Besides that Bejo Seeds has dropped the price for organic onion seed to 2,1 times the conventional price to contribute to a solution. After a long discussion the expert group decided to advice the government to put onions on the national annex. This is a mayor step forwards and a signal to the seed companies. Onion is the first large vegetable crop on the annex! Of course the Dutch farmers and seed companies hope that this step will stimulate other countries to take similar steps.

The varieties available in NL are: Accent F1 (Bejo), Balstora (Bejo), Donna (Hoogzand), Hoza (Hoogzand), Hytech F1 (Bejo), Hyfort F1 (Bejo), Hyskin F1 (Bejo), Hystar F1 (Bejo), Julia (Hoogzand), Profit (Advanta), Rijnsburger 4 (De Bolster), Rijnsburger 5 Balaton (Vitalis), Sturon (Carel Bouma, Hild), Red Baron (Bejo), Redspark F1 (Bejo), Romy (Hoogzand).

More information: Maaike Raaijmakers

Proceedings of the COST SUSVAR workshop on Cereal crop diversity: Implications for production and products (Ed. H Østergård and L Fontaine, 2006)

The proceeding of the workshop on Cereal crop diversity: Implications for production and products have been published recently. The proceeding comprises papers based on oral and poster presentations at the COST860 - SUSVAR workshop on cereal crop diversity held in La Besse, France, 13-14 June 2006.

SUSVAR stands for ‘Sustainable low-input cereal production: required varietal characteristics and crop diversity’ and COST is an intergovernmental framework for European co-operation in the field of scientific and technical research. The SUSVAR network, initiated spring 2004, now includes researchers from more than 100 institutions in 28 European countries. The main aims of the SUSVAR network are to ensure stable and acceptable yields of good quality for low-input, especially organic, cereal production in Europe. This will be achieved by developing ways to increase and make use of crop diversity, by establishing methods for selecting varieties, lines and populations taking into account genotype-environment interactions and by establishing common methodology for variety testing where appropriate. The present workshop focused on ways to increase and make use of crop diversity from the production to the product. As crop diversity often is argued to be an advantage for the grower but a problem for the end user of high quality grain products, the six introductory oral presentations gave introduction to farmer’s conception of diversity and examples of practical applications of variety mixtures for baking and distilling quality. The remaining part of the workshop was open for poster contributions reflecting

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the ongoing research within the SUSVAR network on crop diversity. The posters were grouped into four topics: Growing variety mixtures, Evolutionary processes in diverse crops, Genetic diversity and Variety and species mixtures, diseases and soil. The posters were introduced by a moderator and their contribution is included as an introduction to each topic.

This proceeding may give inspiration for those involved with plant breeding and plant production of cereals as well as other crops by presenting methodologies for studying genetic diversity and genotype-environment interactions in cereals as well as practical applications of crop diversity: variety mixtures, composite crosses and intercropping.

The proceedings are available on the SUSVAR homepage (www.cost860.dk) to download or to make a request for a hardcopy posted for free.

For more information contact: Hanne Østergård, Risø National Laboratory, Denmark, Chair of COST860-SUSVAR or Laurence Fontaine, ITAB, France

Susceptibility of spring barley to loose smut and usefulness of different sources of loose smut resistance

An interesting publication about susceptibility of spring barley to loose smut and usefulness of different sources of loose smut resistance related to loose smut origins from different countries of Europe is now published. Also a table about the demands for seed certification related to loose smut in many countries of Europe is also included.

Forty-two registered spring barley cultivars from the German official list were tested under natural infection conditions for susceptibility to loose smut (Ustilago tritici f.sp. hordei) during two test cycles at two locations. Only cv. Steffi was found to be resistant to the local loose smut population. Cultivar Sigrid showed lowest susceptibility because of flowering inside the leaf sheath. Less than 1% infection at all sites showed up in cvs Auriga, Jacinta and Hendrix. Twenty-one cultivars had an infection rate of less than 2%. Cultivar Danuta displayed the highest susceptibility with an average of 12.6%.

Another 23 spring barley accessions with expected loose smut resistance were inoculated artificially with loose smut populations obtained from 11 locations in Germany and neighbouring countries. Only Jet with the resistance Un3/6, CDC Freedom with Un8, CIho9973 with quantitative resistance, as well as Lino and GangTuoQuingKeHao1 remained disease-free. In addition to these, another eight accessions in this test group are recommended to become part of a differential tester set to distinguish origins of loose smut. Statistical analysis showed that for scoring of cultivars more importance has to be given to the number of locations for infestation than to the number of test locations to determine the degree of attack.

In view of the existing inspection limits for production of certified seed in European countries, the currently registered German barley cultivars put organic seed producers and breeders at high risk in respect to loose smut infection, if the number of generations for multiplication under organic farming increases. For further information see: MUELLER,K.J. 2006: Susceptibility of German spring barley cultivars to loose smut populations from different European origins. European Journal of Plant Pathology (EJPP), Vol.116, No.2, 145-153.

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New EU policy project on conservation varieties 2007-2009

A new EU project, called Farm Seed Opportunities, is about to start with 12 partners from six countries (Fr, IT, NL, ES, UK, CH). De coordination is in hands of Veronique Chable of INRA (Fr). Although the issue of conservation varieties is not limited to organic agriculture, most partners are involved in organics.
The strict rules for marketing of seeds (set in Directive 98/95/EC) combined with the small market niches for landraces varieties have threatened the conservation of local varieties and the agrobiodiversity. In preparing the EU Directive facilitating the certification and marketing of seed in the interest of conserving plant genetic resources, Farms Seed Opportunities will contribute to the enlargement of the market of local varieties, by setting up a science and marketing based framework involving all relevant actors.
To achieve this objective, Farm Seeds Opportunities will:

- Characterise requirements of the different stakeholders with regards to the diversity of varieties derived from the on farm conservation / management / breeding and of regional agricultural systems in Europe;
- Identify bottlenecks and challenges for participatory on-farm breeding and seed production;
- Develop methodologies, combining scientific approaches and farmers know-how, sited to targeted improvements of conservation, breeding. seed production and marketing;
- Provide practical recommendations far the decision-making processes relating to the market release of seeds of landraces. conservation and amateur varieties;
- Provide a practical framework for the protection and promotion of landraces. Conservation varieties and amateur varieties. especially issued from the participatory plant breeding and small scale breeders;
- Provide the society at large with adequate information about scientific results and on-going research to address its demand for locally produced food concerns on the preservation of endangered agro-biodiversity and to stimulate is Involvement in decision-making

The Consortium associates six North and South European countries to cover a great variability of regional characteristics. Combining scientific competences and farmer knowledge will enable, in an approach of participatory innovation, the development of on-farm plant breeding and genetic resources management.

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