

### **European Commission gives in on GM Seed Directive**

Change of legal basis of controversial law to allow for contamination of seeds with GMOs

The European "Save our Seeds" Initiative today celebrates an important, first success regarding the planned Directive on GM seed contamination. As the EU Commission today informed the permanent representatives of the Council, it has changed its legal assessment and accepts that the proposed Directive can only be adopted by a qualified majority of member states within the Standing Committee responsible for deliberate releases of GMOs into the environment (Directive 2001/18).

Until now the Commission intended to push through the GM Seeds Directive under a technical procedure in the Standing Committee on Seeds, where it would have been adopted unless a qualified majority of member states voted against it. A variety of member states as well as the European Parliament had raised reservations about this procedure.

"This is good news for democratic principles," said Benedikt Haerlin, co-ordinator of the Save our Seeds Initiative, "however the proposed contamination thresholds proposed by the Commission remain unchanged. It is now up to the member states governments to ensure that non-gm seeds are truly free of GMOs and to establish strict purity standards."

The EU commission proposes under the GM seed Directive to allow for unlabelled contamination of seeds with genetically modified varieties between 0,3 and 0,7 percent. This would result in massive and uncontrolled releases of GMOs into the environment, even if no farmer intentionally planted such GMOs. GMO free agriculture and food would become virtually impossible.

Under Directive 2001/18 on the deliberate release of GMOs any release of GMOs must be labelled, registered and monitored. Only for food and feed thresholds of 0,9 % have been established, below which the products need not be labelled as genetically modified.

The "Save our Seeds" initiative demands that any GM contamination above the reliable and practical detection limit of 0,1 % must be labelled and the purity of conventional and organic seeds must be strictly protected. It comprises more than 300 farmers, consumers and environmental organisations (with a combined membership of over 25 million citizens) throughout Europe as well as more than 100.000 individual signers of the "SOS-petition".

For more information: [Benedikt Haerlin](#), Save our Seeds, c/o Zukunftsstiftung Landwirtschaft, Berlin +49 30-27590309, [www.saveourseeds.org](http://www.saveourseeds.org)

### **Initiative to found an ECO-AB for organic animal breeding**

Edith Lammerts van Bueren, chair of ECO-PB, gave a presentation on ECO-PB's activities and organisation in an international meeting on organic animal breeding in Driebergen (NL) on October 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>. This group is considering a similar association on European level following the example of ECO-PB. The European Consortium for Organic Animal Breeding (ECO-AB) will stimulate international networking, lobby and support for research.

For more information: [Wietze Nauta](#)

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### **XVIIth Eucarpia General Congress**

In 2004 Eucarpia will organise the XVIIth Eucarpia General Congress, Tulln/Austria from 8 -11 September on Genetic Variation for Plant Breeding. This is an interesting theme for organic plant breeding also. More information on the call for papers and registration: [www.eucarpia.org](http://www.eucarpia.org)

### **Winter Cereal Variety Trials of Elm Farm Research Center**

EFRC variety trials provide information about the relative performance of cereals in organic production systems. As well as evaluating varieties in monoculture, these trials evaluate the performance of cereal varieties in mixtures; hence these trials are an essential component of the EFRC cereals research programme. An early harvest means that 2002 results are just in, how did the winter wheat, triticale and oat varieties perform?

**WHEAT:** The soft endosperm wheat Claire performed best in terms of yield in 2000, 2001 and 2002, this variety had the largest yield again this year, with Exsept also performing well. In terms of yield potential and reliability of yield, Hereward continues to be the pick of the bread making wheats. The poor performer across a number of years has been Malacca, this variety along with Xi19 has again performed poorly in 2003. In general, results for winter wheat in 2003 have been highly variable, this illustrates the unreliability of most of the modern wheat varieties in organic production systems.

Varieties produced by the German breeder FR Strube are purported to be strong competitors against weeds, as well as having good 'nitrogen scavenging' abilities. If plant height alone is an indicator of competitiveness against weeds then the Strube varieties Aristos, Levendis, Pegassos and Tataros are head and shoulders (actually 10 - 15cm) above common modern varieties, but still not approaching the heights of Maris Widgeon, this carries a further 20cm above the Strube wheats.

The typical (NABIM) criteria of grain quality for bread making wheats (Group 1) are grain protein (Dumas method, % DM) > 13 % (organic wheat can expect a slight reduction in this tolerance), Hagberg falling number > 250 seconds and a specific weight > 76 kg/hl. None of the varieties achieved these standards across all criteria! None of the group 1 wheats achieved the NABIM typical requirements of bread making wheats, most importantly in terms of protein content but also in terms of the Hagberg falling number. The biscuit and feed wheat criteria are a maximum protein of 12.5%, a minimum Hagberg falling number of 180 and a minimum specific weight of 74 kg/hl. Therefore, in general, specific weights were low, but varieties for biscuit making varieties and feed were of an acceptable quality.

**TRITICALE:** In 2003 the yields of the triticale varieties were significantly different, with Tricolor yielding less than either Ego and Partout. In terms of yield, over the last four seasons, the relative performance of Ego has been consistently good.

If we apply the quality criteria required of feed wheat to the triticale, then we can see that the triticale had similar protein levels to those achieved in the feed wheats, but specific weights were even lower (incidentally the Hagberg falling number average was only 65). It is interesting to note that the triticale had lower grain yields, on average, than the winter wheat in 2003.

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OATS: Oats out yielded all other winter cereals again this year, it is also interesting to note that the L.S.D. for oats was less than the triticale and the wheat, this is one indicator of the relative stability of this species. As found in other years, any differences between varieties were not significant.

By Scott Phillips, IOR - EFRC Senior Researcher

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