

IFOAM Conference on Organic Animal and Plant Breeding and public consultation on the IFOAM Organic Seed Position Paper

On August 25 - 28, 2009, the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) is holding the "Breeding Diversity" Conference in Santa Fe, NM, USA. Leading scientists, activists, farmers and breeders will come together to share their latest findings and positions on organic breeding and agro-biodiversity conservation in order to find new ways to address the challenges of today and tomorrow.

"Breeding for organic farming and rescuing traditional plant varieties and animal species is fundamental to developing the genetic base for a sovereign agriculture that will produce food for everyone in an era of climate change, peak oil and food crisis." says key note speaker Miguel Altieri .

The conference will also provide the forum for the first public consultation on the IFOAM Organic Seed Position Paper. In response to the instructions given by the IFOAM General Assembly in 2008, IFOAM has developed a draft position paper on the use of organic seed and propagation materials in organic agriculture (OA). The paper covers issues relating to breeding techniques, the use of traditional varieties and legislation. The full paper is accessible on the IFOAM website at: <http://www.ifoam.org/press/positions/index.php>

Breeding techniques

According to the Principles of OA organic breeding must stay within the limits of natural reproduction, however it is still to be determined which techniques should be prohibited and which ones should be allowed or encouraged in organic plant breeding.

Traditional varieties

Traditional varieties usually contain a greater genetic variability than modern commercial varieties, and were typically developed under low input management practices. Given that traditional varieties maybe superior for OA than modern mainstream varieties, IFOAM proposes that its standards are amended to explicitly recommend the use of traditional seed in order to value their importance not only for traditional communities but also for the preservation of genetic diversity.

Seed legislation and patenting

Many national seed laws (e.g. in Europe) require seeds to be genetically uniform making registration of varieties bred for genetic variability and adaptability impossible. IFOAM proposes that changes are made to the legal systems so the use and marketing of varieties bred for adaptability is not blocked. IFOAM also proposes that the use of seeds protected by intellectual property (IP) rights should be prohibited in OA.

The consultation will be done in two rounds; on Wednesday 26th in an open session for public information and consultation, and on Thursday 27th in an IFOAM members-only session. A seed position blog has been created at: <http://www.IFOAMblog.wordpress.com> to increase input ahead of the conference. To join the blog please contact Anna: a.wissmann@ifoam.org

Join us at Santa Fe! The time is right to address the urgent questions on future organic production! Register now online for conference participation at: http://shop.ifoam.org/conference_1/product_info.php?cPath=44&products_id=127 and benefit from the special online registration discount! Are you an IFOAM member? Click here for the

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By Zoe Heuschkel

Discussion workshop on international organic plant breeding standards

During the upcoming "International IFOAM Conference on Organic Animal and Plant Breeding" in August 25 – 28, a workshop is scheduled on Wednesday, August 26 from 15.30 -17.00 aiming to discuss international organic plant breeding standards. To start the plenary discussion, a panel of experts from different parts of the world will present their ideas concerning the idea to be able to certify those breeders that breed under organic conditions and would like to distinguish themselves in the market. The question is how to design such standards that allow for plant breeding innovations and the one hand and that not too vague to be inspected on the other hand.

This workshop discussion follows the motion ECO-PB had submitted to the IFOAM General Assembly with the following text: "Complete the work on the draft plant breeding standards as soon as possible with the view of adopting them as IFOAM (certification) standards". This motion was accepted by the IFOAM GA.

To make a public statement on organic plant breeding methods, it is vital that the current draft standards on plant breeding become full standards as soon as possible. ECO-PB would like to offer its expertise within the ECO-PB network to assist IFOAM in refining standards for organic plant breeding and adapting them to the new IBS framework (maybe as sector specific certification standards). The IFOAM World Board agreed to keep the draft standards in place until new standards are accepted and welcomes new proposals to be discussed at the Santa Fe conference workshop.

Contact persons are Edith Lammerts van Bueren (ECO-PB) and Maaïke Raaijmakers (Biologica, IFOAM EU Group), Klaus Peter Wilbois (FiBL Germany)

Discussion workshop on developing guidelines for cell fusion techniques in organic breeding

A second workshop during the "IFOAM Conference on Organic Animal and Plant Breeding" is scheduled on Thursday August 27 from 15.30-17.00 and aims to offer a broad platform for proposals for guidelines on how to deal with varieties bred with cell fusion techniques that are not permitted by the IFOAM standards. What the consequences are for the use of or a ban on varieties bred with these techniques in the organic sector in Europe and other parts of the world will be discussed.

This workshop follows the motion that was accepted by the General Assembly of IFOAM at Modena in 2008 stating: "The IFOAM GA 2008 confirms that cell fusion, including protoplast and cytoplasm fusion, do not comply with the principles of organic agriculture. Therefore we urge the IFOAM World Board to develop clear guidelines on how to deal with varieties derived from cell fusion, including protoplast and cytoplasm fusion breeding techniques."

So, within the IFOAM there is consensus on the fact that cell fusion does not comply to the IFOAM principles as Genetic Engineering (GE) is banned. However, the problem is how to deal with it in practice since varieties bred with this techniques are not labelled as Genetic Modified Organisms (GMO) and the use of these varieties is not explicitly forbidden for instance in the EU regulation on organic farming.

Some countries have negative or positive variety lists to show which varieties are bred or not with cell fusion techniques to implement already existing private standards that forbid the use of „CMS varieties“ obtained by cell fusion techniques. But most countries have not taken any measures so far. FiBL Switzerland has published a report on this issue to enhance the discussion (cf. Billmann, B. 2008; <http://www.orgprints.org/13573>). Seed companies which already serve or want to enter the organic market are seeking clarity on a short term.

As a preparation and discussion input for the IFOAM conference in Santa Fe, ECO-PB and ITAB, France have organised a European workshop to discuss strategies for a broader implementation of an exclusion of „CMS varieties“ obtained by cell fusion techniques (see also message below).

Contacts persons are Edith Lammerts van Bueren (ECO-PB) and Maaïke Raaijmakers (Biologica, IFOAM EU Group), Klaus Peter Wilbois (FiBL-Germany)

ECO-PB/ITAB Workshop in Paris: Strategies for a future without cell fusion techniques in varieties applied in Organic Farming

The Proceedings and a declaration out the ECO-PB/ITAB Workshop held in Paris 27 – 28 April 2009 are now published on the ECO-PB web site and can be looked up under: http://www.eco-pb.org/09/Proceedings_Paris_090427.pdf and http://www.eco-pb.org/09/Declaration_Paris_090428.pdf respectively.

Announcement: International Attuning of the Assortment, Supply and Demand of Organic Seed

is the title of an upcoming venue to be held on October 26 – 27 in the Organic Research Centre, Elm Farm, Hamstead Marshall, Newbury, Berkshire, UK. This conference is a follow up consultation to those held on the issue of the European organic seed regime starting in 2002. For further information on the background of this series of events see for instance http://www.eco-pb.org/09/Report_ECO-PB_Organic_Seed_meeting_NL_08092526.pdf and http://www.eco-pb.org/09/report_warmenhuizen_06.pdf. The programme and further information on this event will follow in the upcoming Newsletter and also placed on the front page of the ECO-PB web site.

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ECO-PB Board elected at the General Assembly

Attached to the ECO-PB/ITAB Workshop in Paris on April 28 2009 ECO-PB held its General Assembly. The president of ECO-PB, Edith Lammerts van Bueren, presented the annual report on the activities of ECO-PB in 2008 (see http://www.eco-pb.org/09/annual_report_2008.pdf) and

chaired the lively discussion that was mainly dedicated to upcoming IFOAM Conference on Organic Animal and Plant Breeding and the topic to be discussed there e.g. the implementation of the exclusion of the so called "CMS varieties" obtain by cell fusion techniques and organic breeding standards. During the ECO-PB GA a new board was elected. The elected board members are Christine Arncken (FiBL-CH), Edith Lammerts van Bueren (LBI-NL), Hanne Ostergard (Riso-DK), Francois Lhopiteau (ITAB-Fr), Klaus-Peter Wilbois (FiBL-D), and Lawrence Woodward (ORCEF-UK).

By Klaus-Peter Wilbois;

The Future of Organic Vegetable seed

is the title of the event on Thursday 15th October carried out at Elsoms Seeds, Spalding, Lincolnshire, United Kingdom (www.elsoms.com). Join the team at Elsoms Seeds for a tour of their facilities near Spalding in Lincolnshire. This event is coupled with their annual open day and is an excellent opportunity to see a wide range of exhibitors. The day will include a tour of their Brassica trials ground as well as a talk on plant breeding and the processes necessary for producing clean seed.

Please book a place in advance (and let us know if you're not coming!!) but payment can be made on the day. This is an Organic Growers Alliance event, £ 25 for members and £ 35 for non-members (plus VAT).

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