

Under Evaluation: The Legislation governing the marketing of seeds and plant propagating material (S&PM) within the European Union

Many directives on the issue date back to the sixties and seventies. As the balance of priorities has changed over the years, with elements such as food safety, traceability, new technologies and environmental aspects becoming more prominent, plus the expansion of the EU to now span 27 Member States, newer legal instruments may be more appropriate to regulate the marketing of S&PM to the benefit of both users and suppliers.

The Commission has therefore decided to review the legislation (the *acquis*) on the marketing of seeds and plant propagating material, as part of its better regulation initiative. The first step of this review process consists of an evaluation of the current *acquis*. This should provide documented answers on the strengths and weaknesses of the current system for achieving the set objectives, or highlight the need to set new objectives in order to respond to new and anticipated challenges. An equally important aim is to explore the possibilities for simplification and a reduction of administrative burdens on both public authorities and private sector stakeholders. The evaluation will be carried out by external consultants (the FCEC consortium), assisted by a Steering Group composed of a balanced mix of experts from a number of Member States and from the Commission's services. The task of the Steering Group is to assist in drafting the terms of reference and the questionnaire, and to ensure the quality of the final report. On the basis of the recommendations to be contained in the final report, the Commission will then draft an action plan, laying out a programme for putting into practice any suggested reforms.

As part of the process a survey questionnaire has been published on the web site of the EU Commission (http://ec.europa.eu/food/plant/propagation/evaluation/index_en.htm) with which stakeholders can give their view on the current Community S&PM *acquis* and to gather suggestions for the future.

ECO-PB considers this evaluation as having far reaching implications on organic farming and organic plant breeding and has therefore submitted the filled questionnaire. People engaged in organic farming and breeding also interested in submitting their view in the process may fill in the questionnaire and send it to the commission until April 11th.

In order to make it easier to fill in the questionnaire you may get the completed one of ECO-PB on request. Please send an e-mail to klaus.wilbois@fibl.org

Conference on Value for Cultivation and Use of Variety testing for organic cereal production: What are the key issues?

This was the title of a conference organised by ECO-PB, Institute for Agriculture and Fisheries Research (ILVO) and SUSVAR Cost Action 860 on 28th and 29th February 2008 in Brussels, Belgium. Amongst other issues, the role of VCU and variety testing with regard to the needs of organic and low input farming was debated in an international panel of discussants.

In the discussions it became clear that the cost of VCU trials vary significantly across European countries as a result of differences in the subsidisation by the Government and the overheads of the testing authority. If VCU becomes non-statutory, the out-sourcing of performance testing may provide major costs savings as a result of competitive market forces. This potential reduced

price, combined with the sharing of such testing between all stakeholders could provide a more holistic and relevant range of performance tests.

Another important point was: How can we fit adaptive populations into a wider interpretation of the regulations? This issue became important since trials carried out in the Wheat Breeding project LINK of Organic Research Centre Elm Farm and others (<http://www.efrc.com>) confirmed that in practice there was a consistent improvement in yield, particularly for populations that were exposed to more than one site within a farming system.

A full report on the workshop is in preparation and will be announced in a coming ECO-PB newsletter.

By Klaus-Peter Wilbois (klaus.wilbois@fibl.org)

Seed session during the IFOAM Organic World Congress 2008

During the 16th IFOAM Organic World Congress which is going to be held from June 18-20 2008 in Modena, Italy, there will be special seed session titled 'VIABLE SEED FOR ORGANIC AGRICULTURE' on Friday, June 20th, 2.30 pm - 6.00 pm.

The module will integrate all the components of the challenges associated with organic seed production; from the organization of the (participatory) research to seed legislation; from challenges with on-farm conservation to the spread and use of landraces, conservation varieties and amateur varieties. This module can be seen as complementing the previous workshop on genetic engineering and genetically modified organisms. It is clear that the organic sector does not accept GMOs, it is also clear that Organic Agriculture needs another way and other options. The work on GMO-free zones and a presentation of the results of the Planet Diversity Conference will form a natural bridge from the GMO session to this session on organic seed.

In addition to field experiences from all over the globe, this session will concentrate on a European project looking at farm seed opportunities, which can be exemplary for other continents and regions. This session deserves attention if we are to be able to harvest organically in future!

For further information see: http://shop.ifoam.org/events/ifoam_conferences/owc/pdf/Registration_Brochure.pdf

World Congress on the Future of Food and Farming

Under the auspice of several organisations e.g., IFOAM (Organic Agricultural Movements), Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, EED (Protestant Church Development Service), ABL (Family Farmers Union in Via Campesina), SOS (Foundation on Future Farming) a world congress on the future of Food and Farming titled is going to be held in Bonn, Germany, 12 – 16 May 2008.

The primary goal of this event is to discuss how farmers, consumers, food producers and their communities can cooperate to enrich and defend this diversity. 'Planet Diversity' should be a bold message to the government representatives of the Rio-Convention on Biodiversity and its Biosafety Protocol to make biological as well as cultural diversity the starting point and true goal of their negotiations.

The organizers see a global movement from different directions coming together for the common cause of defending diversity against destructive and threatening tendencies in agricultural production, land use and food production. 'Planet Diversity' shall bring together representatives from local and regional grassroots movements and institutions working on food and agricultural innovation and reconciliation based upon cultural and biological diversity.

For further information see: www.planet-diversity.org

Campaign 'Sowing Future!'

'Sowing Future!' is a campaign which takes place in the coming autumn on 25 farms in Switzerland and bordering countries. All people are invited to jointly sow fields with cereals. This shall act both as an unforgettable event for the people taking part and manifestation against genetic engineering. We sow what we like to harvest and eat in the future. The responsibility for this is on us. We are many and we have the fields and the seed!

For further information see: http://www.avenirsem.ch/index.php?article_id=73

On March 15 organic seed was sown together with Greenpeace and 450 participants next to the GMO trial field in Zurich-Reckenholz.

For further information see: http://www.avenirsem.ch/index.php?article_id=64 and also <http://www.greenpeace.ch/de/themen/gentech/gentech-news-single/archive/2008/march/article/zukunft-saeen-ohne-gentechnik-1/>

On March 16 organic seed was sown together with Greenpeace and 320 participants next to the GMO trial field in Pully-Lausanne.

For further information see: http://www.avenirsem.ch/index.php?article_id=74 and also <http://www.greenpeace.ch/fr/campagnes/genie-genetique/dissemination/semmer-lavenir-sans-genie-genetique/>

OMRI reduces costs for listing in improved Organic Seed Database

In January, the Organic Materials Review Institute (OMRI) reduced prices for seed suppliers to list organic varieties in the Organic Seed Database. OMRI established the database in October 2006. The site uses an online search tool to assist organic farmers and certifiers seeking organic seeds and planting stocks.

The change represents a substantial fee reduction for suppliers. Previously, seed companies paid a flat \$25 plus \$50 for every five varieties included beyond the initial five. Effective today, the new fee will simply be a \$60 flat rate. Payments not made through PayPal will cost \$15 extra.

Friends of the Earth Europe published new Report: GM crops increase pesticide use and fail to alleviate poverty

Genetically Modified (GM) crops have led to a massive increase in pesticide use and have failed to increase yields or tackle world hunger and poverty, the new report by Friends of the Earth reveals.

For further information see: http://www.foeeurope.org/press/2008/Feb13_GM_crops_pesticide_poverty.html