

## ANNUAL REPORT OF ECO-PB ACTIVITIES

DECEMBER 2004-DECEMBER 2005

### Board meetings and General Assembly

ECO-PB's fourth General Assembly (GA) was held on the 17th January 2005 In Driebergen/The Netherlands, before the ECO-PB/COST SUSVAR Workshop on Organic Plant breeding strategies and the use of molecular markers. During the GA the proposed board was re-elected and ECO-PB's board for 2005 exists of:

Edith Lammerts van Bueren/Louis Bolk Institute (NL) – president  
Lawrence Woodward/Elm Farm Research centre (UK) – treasurer  
Klaus-Peter Wilbois/ Forschungsinstitut Biologische Landbau (D) – secretary  
Oliver Ranke/Institut Technique de l'Agriculture Biologique (F)  
Hanne Oestergaard/Risø National Laboratory (DK)  
Christine Arncken/Forschungsinstitut Biologische Landbau (CH).

In 2005 the board met in Driebergen (NL) after the GA on 19<sup>th</sup> January to take actions on the list of issues and future plans that were discussed during the GA. During the rest of the year there was frequent contact between board members at different conferences or by email.

### New members

In 2005 we welcomed several new members: Attached is an updated list of all members of 2005

### Activities

#### - IFOAM standards on organic plant breeding

IFOAM has published the draft standards for organic plant breeding as they were published in 2002. IFOAM headoffice is planning a subcommittee on this issue in 2006 to plan future steps. ECO-PB will be member of this subcommittee.

#### - EU Organic Seed Regulations and international co-operation.

A third international workshop was successfully organised by ECO-PB together with G. Plakolm and E. Fromm of the Austrian Bundesministerium für Land-, Forstwirtschaft, Umwelt und Wasserwirtschaft, on November 4, 2005 in Vienna, connected to the meeting of the EU project Organic Revision. Some 25 representatives of 11 countries participated. The participants were convinced that this was a fruitful meeting to update each other. It showed that slow progress is being made, but still many obstacles need to be faced. A large list of recommendations was discussed and a letter on behalf of the participants with action points for the EU Commission was send at the beginning of January 2006. A report on the results was send to the participants and published on ECO-PB website (<http://www.eco-pb.org/09/rp.htm>).

#### - Protoplastfusion in EU Org. Agr. Regulation

The board wanted more action to ban varieties based on protoplast fusion. Maaïke Raaijmakers/Biologica-NL worked out a discussion paper on the facts of protoplast fusion, see <http://www.eco-pb.org/09/pp.htm>. She has presented this paper for the IFOAM EU GROUP in 2004. This technique falls under the EU definition of GMO and is therefore not permitted in organic agriculture. The wide interpretation of the EC Directive 2001/18 regulation results in not needing a

license to use this technique, so the seeds originated from this technique are not labelled as 'GM' and are not recognizable (for farmers) as being GM. Therefore it is hard to implement a ban. Nevertheless the The Forschungsring für Biologisch-Dynamische Wirtschaftsweise and Demeter International decided in November 2005 to publish a negative list of varieties that have been bred on the basis of this technique ([http://www.eco-pb.org/07/nops\\_0812\\_05.pdf](http://www.eco-pb.org/07/nops_0812_05.pdf)).

- Conservation Varieties Directive 98/95/EC

There is (slow) 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. With thanks to Karl-Josef Mueller (Cereal Breeding Darzau/Germany) ECO-PB has sent a letter to the commission to support a letter that IFOAM EU 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 years, and it is not uniformity but recognisability 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.

- *Harmonizing threshold values for seed transmitted diseases in Europe with respect to the demands of organic farming.*

This issue has been brought in and discussed among the participants of the ECO-PB Organic Seed Workshop in Vienna, 4. November 2005. The differences with regard to thresholds for seed transmitted disease and the lack of harmonisation have been acknowledged by the experts. But it was also pointed out that due to regional and climatic differences a harmonisation might cause problems with either too high or too low thresholds regarding the respective region of Europe. Therefore it has not been regarded as a priority for European organic seed production.

- *Developing criteria for releasing varieties in particular for organic farming in Europe, related to a higher degree of biodiversity.*

This will be discussed in WP6 'Variety Testing' of SUSVAR-project, see [www.cost860.dk](http://www.cost860.dk)

- *Question how to finance organic breeding in different countries of Europe and which part a "farmed saved seed license agreement" could play.*

Aart Osman, Louis Bolk Institute, is planning to organise an international meeting in cooperation with international partners (a.o. Karl Josef Müller/D) in 2006.

### **Stimulating organic breeding and research activities**

- *COST 860 project*

ECO-PB supported the proposal to set up the COST 860 project on *Sustainable low-input cereal production: Required varietal characteristics and crop diversity (SUSVAR)* by Hanne Østergård (DK). For further information see [www.cost860.dk](http://www.cost860.dk).

- *Community Programme AGRI GEN RES2005 (EC 870/2004)*

By the end of July a long delayed call for proposals for the Community Programme AGRI GEN RES2005 (EC 870/2004) On Conservation, Characterisation, Collection and Utilisation of Genetic Resources in Agriculture was launched, with a short deadline of 30 September 2005. Cornelia Wiethaler (Agrivivendi-D) and Edith Lammerts van Bueren (Louis Bolk Institute-NL) had taken the initiative to bring together the potential partners / NGO's from the organic sector together in a joint project already in March 2004. Eventually 8 countries joined the final project proposal (NL, D, A, F, I, S, ES, SL, Gr). The title of the proposal: Broadening genetic diversity on organic farms in Europe (GENRES ORGANIC), focussing on three crops: tomato, wheat and cabbage by: a) inventorying, collecting and characterising genetic resources with traits specifically important for the organic sector; b) regeneration, on farm conservation and seed production of genetic resources with existing networks of organic seed producers; c). conducting field testing and assessment by/with farmers and consumer groups; d). conducting development/selection programmes for adaptation to low-input organic farming; e). stimulating utilisation and dissemination. Final decision is expected mid-2006.

- *How to save seeds of vegetables by the official genebanks BEFORE the variety is taken from the market to keep it on a level of adaptation for further use in breeding.*

Kultursaat/Bingenheim is planning a large project to save open pollinated varieties as much as possible?

- *General principles and standards for certified organic plant breeding*

In Switzerland, from 2000 to 2002 efforts were made to elaborate general principles and standards for certified organic plant breeding. Now Biosuisse and FiBL want to resume this work and elaborate a draft control handbook for breeders. The aim is to discuss the issue from summer 2006 on and to vote on the plant breeding principles, standards and control guidelines in spring 2007. From 2008 on, "certified organic variety" could be a registered trademark.

## Network

- *Baltic States*

Edith Lammerts van Bueren and KlausPeter Wilbois represented ECO-PB with presentations on the ENVIRFOOD conference in Talsia-Latvia 31 May-June3, 2005, organised within a EU 6<sup>th</sup> Framework project. The reports are published on the ECO-PB website (<http://www.eco-pb.org/09/rp2.htm>).

- *USA*

On behalf of ECO-PB Edith Lammerts van Bueren was invited as speaker on the 2005 Seeds and Breeds conference in the US on September 11-14, 2005, in Ames-Iowa, organised by Michael Sligh/RAFI and Walter Goldstein/Michael Fields institute. 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.

- *Denmark*

On the 13th of December a 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). Edith Lammerts van Bueren was invited speaker on behalf of ECO-PB to give an update of the state of the art of organic seed production in Europe. For further information see [http://www.eco-pb.org/07/nops\\_0812\\_05.pdf](http://www.eco-pb.org/07/nops_0812_05.pdf).

## **ECO-PB newsletter**

The board had decided in 2004 to go on with the current format and monthly (as much as possible) frequency of publishing. In 2004 the newsletter came out in a two monthly frequency. In 2005 four issues were published: January/February, March/April, May-July, August-December 2005. There are 672 subscribers registered in the mailing list.

## **Future activities**

### **2006**

#### *Workshop Participatory Plant Breeding in Organic Agriculture*

ECO-PB together with INRA, Biocivam and Réseau Semences Paysannes is organising an international workshop on participatory plant breeding in France on June 11-13, 2006 in Carcassonne-France. The focus will be on examples of participatory plant breeding or selection activities in the field of organic agriculture, but also on training of farmers for seed saving, seed production or selection activities. The ECO-PB workshop will be partly combined with the COST 860 SUSVAR workshop at the same location from 12-14 June, 2006.

#### *Invitational workshop on financing structures for organic plant breeding*

There must be ways found to stimulate and finance organic plant breeding. Eco-PB is aiming at organising a workshop on financing plant breeding. As Aart Osman/Louis Bolk Institute-NL is picking this issue up in his PhD-thesis in 2006 ECO-PB has asked him to see whether he can coordinate/contribute to such an international. Because it is rather a specialised subject and it would be most fruitful if we have no more than 20 people around the table to really brainstorm thoroughly. To be planned for autumn of 2006.

### **2007**

In collaboration with the Working Group Organic Plant Breeding of EUCARPIA, the European association of breeding research, an international conference on November 7-9, 2007 in Wageningen-NL is planned.

### **2008**

There are plans to carry out a *First World Congress on Organic Plant Breeding* in cooperation with IFOAM and FAO in 2008. Edith Lammerts van Bueren has suggested this to IFOAM headoffice and has been received positively, and will be further discussed before definite decision.

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## **Members of ECO-PB**

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### **Full members**

Institut Technik Agriculture Biologique, France  
Forschungsinstitut für Biologischen Landbau, Switzerland  
Forschungsinstitut für Biologischen Landbau, Germany  
Danisch Agricultural Center of Organic Farming, Denmark  
Tesco, University Newcastle, United Kingdom  
Elm Farm Research Center, United Kingdom  
Stichting Zaagoed, The Netherlands  
Vitalis, The Netherlands  
Louis Bolk Institute, The Netherlands

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### **Associate members**

Karl-Josef Müller, ABDP, Germany  
Bob Brac de la Perrière, RSP, France  
Beat Boller, Switzerland  
Dirk Reheul, Belgium  
Sharon Rempel, Canada  
Michaela Cerne, Slovenia  
Fred van de Crommet, Bejo, The Netherlands  
Fadul Önemli, Turkey  
Reinhild Frech-Emmelmann, Austria

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