ECO-PB Board elected at the General Assembly

Attached to the 10 years's anniversary conference in Frankfurt 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 2011 and chaired the General Assembly. During the ECO-PB GA a new board was elected. The elected board members are Monika Messmer (FiBL-CH), Karl-Josef Müller (ABDP, D), Maaike Raaijmakers (Stichting Zaadgoed-NL), Frederic Rey (ITAB-Fr), Klaus-Peter Wilbois (FiBL-D), and Thomas Döring (ORCEF-UK). Edith Lammerts van Bueren (LBI-NL) withdrew from the board and from the chair position after ten successful years of ECO-PB presidency. Monika Messmer (FiBL-CH) followed her as president of ECO-PB and thanked Edith Lammerts van Bueren for her great engagement devoted to ECO-PB.

By Klaus-Peter Wilbois (Klaus.Wilbois(at)fibl.org)

Eco-PB's 10 years' anniversary: Organic plant breeding does make a difference!

More than 60 breeders and researchers from 15 different countries attended the ECO-PB conference from November 3rd to November 4th in Frankfurt to celebrate ECO-PB's 10 years' anniversary. In twenty oral presentations, twelve posters and many discussions different aspects of the conference motto "Organic Plant Breeding: What makes the difference?" were highlighted.

Edith Lammert van Bueren, president of ECO-PB from the beginning, gave a short summary of the history of ECO-PB. She pointed out that the meetings have always been an important aspect of ECO-PB, as they have been influential and inspiring for the participating Member States to learn from each other and to exchange procedures to move forward towards harmonisation of interpretation and implementation of the European regulation on Organic Seed. Another significant ECO-PB achievement was the technical collaboration with the world umbrella organisation IFOAM (International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movement).

In four different sessions, new approaches, socioeconomic aspects, examples of breeding programs and new questions on organic plant breeding were presented and discussed. Regarding the new approaches, Family Inter-Crossing (FIC) as an efficient and low priced way of developing a new variety was introduced and discussed. Another topic were methods for maintenance breeding of evolutionary populations in cereals, as farmers have a high interest in using Composite Cross Populations (CCP) in practice. Moreover, the participants were given an insight in extended methods to influence plants, such as eurythmy and tone intervals.

With a view to socioeconomic aspects, a report was given on the opportunities and obstacles for organic breeding programs in The Netherlands. There is a great interest of chain partners to support organic breeding, and especially for potatoes many efforts are taken and good networks have been established. As a result, 50 % of the Dutch potato varieties are selected by farmer breeders. More networking, not only within the organic value chain, but between organic and conventional breeders is another interesting aspect, which was presented. This approach offers several advantages and synergy effects for organic breeding programs. Moreover, the breeding programs on partnership basis of Kultursaat were presented. This breeding association is consumer oriented, transparent and open for anybody, is offers a bottom-up approach and does not insist on the breeder's right.

As one example of an organic breeding program, the development of the hulless spring barley Pirona by Cereal Breeding Research Darzau was presented. Selection criteria were weed

competitiveness and resistance to loose smut, barley leaf stripe, covered smut as well as fusarium head blight. Quality with regard to human nutrition was also taken into account. Another example was the low-tech breeding approach to dehybridize hybrids developed by Sativa Rheinau. F1-hybrides are used as genetic starting material for the organic breeding programs in vegetables because in those hybrids, most of the genetic progress of the past decades has been released. The last example was the biodynamic apple breeding at Poma Culta, where the observation of cosmic rhythms and the application of eurythmy are important aspects.

In the session on new questions, the influence of epigenetic effects was presented and discussed. It is known that epigenetic modifications are highly adaptive to the plants' environment. If those reactions to the environment are inherited from cell to cell without alteration in the DNA sequence, an epigenetic trait has been established. This is important for organic breeding, as it shows that breeding under organic farming conditions is highly recommendable. Finally, the dignity of plant and the thereof resulting consequence for organic plant breeding were discussed. Thus organic plant breeding has to respect the organic farming system as spatial limit, the integrity of the cell as technical limit (no manipulations below the level of the cell) and the ban of patents as legal limit.

The country updates gave insight in the activities in France, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, The Netherlands, Great Britain, the Baltic States and Denmark. These country updates provided many inspirations and motivation for the development in the other countries.

For conference proceedings see
http://www.eco-pb.org/fileadmin/ecopb/documents/ECOPB_Proceedings_2011.pdf

First SOLIBAM Stakeholders Congress: April 18-19th 2012 in Rome (Italy)

Several factors such as a rising world population, a need for greater environmental protection and climate change are increasing the pressure on agricultural systems worldwide. The major concern is how to ensure food security and food quality while maintaining environmental and socio-economic sustainability. The European Union is taking important policy decisions towards the 'greening' of agriculture, which are likely to alter considerably the mode of food production in the near future. Yet, are European farmers ready to take on this challenge? We believe that the key to sustaining food production is diversifying the cropping system at multiple levels, e.g. genetic, species and habitat. Such an approach should be translatable into concrete management strategies applicable to various low-input and organic cropping systems across Europe and elsewhere. The objective of the first SOLIBAM Stakeholders Congress is to provide an international forum for discussion amongst relevant stakeholders around four topical themes. A special focus will be to address future research needs based on the available evidence to date in order to prioritize our activities and exploit fully the potential of diversity to shape the agriculture of tomorrow.

Preliminary programme of the Congress: Four thematic Sessions and one poster session
1. Greening of agriculture
Policy focus: Diversity in cropping systems in the context of the CAP reform
2. Climate change, what challenges for breeding and agriculture?
Policy focus: the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2020, the EU Strategy for Climate Change and Energy
3. Cropping systems of the future

Policy focus: the European Framework Directive on Sustainable Pesticide Use
4. Seeds and sustainable use of plant genetic resources
Policy focus: the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture and the process of revision of seed laws in Europe (Better regulation)

Dates and place: April 18-19th 2012, close to Rome (Italy)

For more information on the Solibam project:
Solibam Newsletter 1: http://www.solibam.eu/modules/wfdownloads/singlefile.php?cid=5&lid=11
Solibam brochure in several languages and more on: www.solibam.eu

For more information on the congress: Riccardo Bocci, E-Mail r.bocci(at)aiab.it

Jan Velema withdraws as Director of Vitalis Organic Seeds

As of 1 January 2012, Jan Velema will withdraw as Director of Vitalis Organic Seeds. Due to personal reasons, Velema has decided to withdraw from Vitalis' daily management and to transfer his shares to Enza Zaden. He will still be involved within the organisation as advisor at Vitalis.

Henk Haitsma will be responsible for the daily management of Vitalis as of 1 January 2012. Since 1998, Haitsma, as chairman of the management team, has been involved in Vitalis as a representative of Enza Zaden. He will be director of Vitalis besides his current position as Director Enza Zaden Benelux.
The Board of Directors of Enza Zaden would like to emphasize that Vitalis' own, organic character is very valuable and something that will be maintained.

In 1994, Jan Velema established Vitalis, a breeding company specialized in the organic market. Apart from managing the new, growing company, Velema has invested a lot of energy into bringing about (international) regulations as well as social, scientific and governmental support for the organic sector. His entrepreneurship, particularly in the early years, has turned Vitalis into a prestigious, well-known company. When, in 1998, it joined the Enza Zaden organisation, the international expansion further increased. Vitalis Organic Seeds has now grown to become a prominent subsidiary in the international Enza Zaden organisation.

For more information contact Enza Zaden: Henk Haitsma, E-Mail: h.haitsma(at)enzazaden.nl or j.velema(at)biovitalis.eu

SVENSKAJA - First winter einkorn with EU-registration

In October 2011 winter einkorn SVENSKAJA, which was developed at Cereal Breeding Research Darzau in and for organic farming, was registered as the first einkorn at all by the Community Plant Variety Office under the registration number EU30803. Svenskaja has very good winter hardiness and shows best yield results also under more intensive organic growing conditions. It may especially be useful for the nordic countries as well as for Germany and Austria. Organic Breeders Seed for multipliers will be made available via contract.

For more information see: www.einkorn.de or contact Karl-Josef Müller, E-Mail: k-j.mueller(at)t-online.de

Winter barley evaluated for susceptibility to barley leaf stripe

The biodynamic breeding initiative "F&Z Dottenfelderhof" in Germany has launched a new project funded by the German governmental Organic Farming Scheme and other Froms of Sustainable Agriculture (BÖLN) this year. More than 140 winter barley varieties, breeding lines and gene bank accessions will be evaluated for susceptibility to barley leaf stripe over the next three years. The results will help to develop new varieties with resistance to barley leaf stripe for the organic market.

For more information: Ben Schmehe, E-Mail ben.schmehe(at)dottenfelderhof.de