

# ANNUAL REPORT OF ECO-PB ACTIVITIES

## APRIL 2001-NOVEMBER 2002

The concept of establishing a European consortium for organic plant breeding was first discussed by Martin Wolfe, Urs Niggli and Edith Lammerts van Bueren during a FAO workshop on research methodology for organic agriculture held at FiBL, Frick in the Autumn of 1998, when FAO stated that they were prepared to support organic breeding by supporting meetings. The idea was to start with the three institutes EFRC, LBI and FiBL and Jeremy Cherfas was asked by Martin Wolfe to coordinate the first actions in this direction. There was already an Initiative for Organic Seeds coordinated by Eric Wyss at FiBL with a newsletter and the idea to make an Organicxseed-list on the website, followed by a European meeting in Frick on 2/3 December 1999, with proceedings from NABU/FiBL.

The first official emailing was for a meeting at EFRC on 4/5 May 2000 with FiBL, EFRC, LBI and KLV-DK. The first question to be addressed was should it be a European Centre for Organic Plant Breeding or a more modest European Consortium? It was decided to go for the latter and the first partners were identified. A specialist from IFOAM, HansPeter Schmidt (D), was asked and paid by Urs Niggli from FiBL to establish which organisational structure would be most appropriate.

On August 30, 2000, during the IFOAM conference in Basel, a second meeting was organised and chaired by Jeremy Cherfas of EFRC where HansPeter Schmidt explained two options for an organisational structure. It was decided to opt for an association with two kinds of members, associate and full, and draft statutes were prepared during the period Sept 2000 and spring 2001.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> preparation meeting was held on April 12, 2001, at LBI in Driebergen-NL with the intention to officially found the ECO-PB and agree on a board and statutes. Jeremy Cherfas did a great job with preparations and chairing the meeting, but also announced that he had applied for a job at IPGRI-Rome and was going to leave EFRC. We agreed on the official founders, although later on it became clear that, according German law, we needed seven instead of just five founding organisations:

- Danish Research Centre for Organic Farming (DK)
- Elm Farm Research Centre (UK)
- Forschungsinstitut für Biologischen Landbau (CH)
- Institut Technique de l'Agriculture Biologique (F)
- Louis Bolk Instituut (NL)
- Arbeitsgemeinschaft Ökologischer Landbau (D)
- Vitalis Biologische Zaden (NL)

The first board was agreed and formed by Edith Lammerts van Bueren (chair), KlausPeter Wilbois (secretary), Lawrence Woodward (finances), Lars Kristensen (member), Francois Lhopiteau (member). According to the statutes, ECO-PB will: a) initiate, establish, support and maintain organic plant breeding programmes, which will make available information and material to European organic farmers and which will correspond to the principles of organic agriculture; b) develop and investigate the concepts and scientific basis of organic plant breeding and c) develop and promote appropriate standards and practises as well as an appropriate legal framework for organic plant breeding. To further its purpose ECO-PB may also provide for exchange of knowledge and thoughts among its members, for the information of the public, and for representation in parliamentary and administrative rule making.

The second ECO-PB board meeting was in Frankfurt 11/12 July 2001 attached to a meeting to organise the so-called "Driebergen-workshop" on breeding techniques. ECO-PB was co-organiser

together with LBI. The first plans for a common variety trial in different countries was initiated and coordinated by James Welsh (EFRC) for winter wheat, assisted by Aart Osman (LBI) for writing a protocol. Further discussion points included how to acquire members, possibilities of applying for a Concerted Action by the EU, organising fundraising, update research in countries, short and long term goals for ECO-PB, position paper on breeding techniques for organic agriculture, brochure to present ECO-PB, preparing a website and designing a logo.

The third ECO-PB board meeting followed the Driebergen-workshop on 19<sup>th</sup> October 2001 in Driebergen/LBI, to discuss the benefits for members: monthly email newsletter, service by information on website, influencing decision making on for instance standards, advocacy for organic plant breeding, patrons, and a launching a meeting in Paris to present ECO-PB. Unfortunately, this last event did not take place due to lack of funds.

In spring 2002, a position paper was prepared by Edith Lammerts and KarlJosef Müller on conservation varieties to feed into the ongoing draft-regulations in Brussels. In addition, the first official contacts were made with the conventional European Seed Association (ESA) via Edith Lammerts and with Roland Peerenboom (ENZA/Vitalis) via KlausPeter Wilbois during the Biofach in Nuremberg in February 2002 to see how ECO-PB could co-operate concerning the seed regime for 2004.

The fourth board meeting was held in Paris on 14<sup>th</sup> May 2002 and discussed a scientific symposium, general assembly and how to give comments on the IFOAM draft standards. On 22 May, detailed comments and proposals were sent on behalf of ECO-PB to IFOAM supported by 10 IFOAM members. During the General Assembly of IFOAM (August 2002) Lawrence Woodward and KlausPeter Wilbois defended the ECO-PB position together with Louise Lutikholt and promoted the definition of organic breeding produced during the Driebergen-workshop in the draft standards. A letter was sent by ECO-PB to the European Commission (Per Ahle) to urge the commission to keep the development moving on the seed regime and not postpone the end of the seed derogation in 2004, to present ECO-PB and offer help, and to invite him to the ECO-PB symposium. Through contacts of Lawrence Woodward, Renate Künast (minister of Consumer Protection, Food and Agriculture, D) and Prof. Hardy Vogtmann (president of the Bundesamt für Naturschutz, D) agreed to be patrons of ECO-PB, as did Ritt Bjerregård (former minister of environment, DK).

In 2002 Eric Wyss switched to another field of research within FiBL and Christine Arncken (FiBL) was co-opted as a board member, especially helping KlausPeter with the Newsletter. Also, Lars Kristensen was replaced by Hanne Østergaard (DK).

We have had good contacts with the IFOAM-EU group via Louise Lutikholt (NL) and with Bernward Geier (IFOAM) who made contact with the International Seed Federation (ISF) with the intention of organising a world conference on organic seed in 2004.

Dr. Edith Lammerts van Bueren  
Driebergen, 20.11.02