

## ANNUAL REPORT OF ECO-PB ACTIVITIES

NOVEMBER 2002 – DECEMBER 2003

### **Board meetings and General Assembly**

ECO-PB's second General Assembly (GA) took place on 21st November 2002 at the Humboldt University Berlin, just before the Symposium Organic Seed Production and Plant Breeding – strategies, problems and perspectives.

During this GA the existing board was re-elected, with the exception of Lars Kristensen. He is no longer involved in organic research and had withdrawn his board membership during 2002 and suggested Hanne Oestergaard, senior researcher at the Plant Research Department of Risoe National laboratory (DARCOF) in Roskilde (DK) as new member for the board. She is involved in barley research. ECO-PB's board now 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  
Francois Lhopiteau/Institut Technique de l'Agriculture Biologique (F)  
Hanne Oestergaard/Danisch Research Centre for Organic Farming (DK)  
Christine Arncken/Forschungsinstitut Biologische Landbau (CH).

In 2003 the board met at Elm Farm Research Centre (UK) for the 8th board meeting on 19-20 August where the initiative was taken for the ECO-PB workshop in Brussels (8 and 9 December 2003). The second board meeting in this period was on December the 9th before the GA in Brussels.

During spring time Francois Lhopiteau announced that he is no longer board member of ITAB, and will concentrate on seed production on his own farm; therefore he will withdraw his ECO-PB board membership and transfer that to Oliver Ranke as French producer and new board member of ITAB.

### **Activities**

#### *ECO-PB newsletter*

Klaus-Peter Wilbois and Christine Arncken have managed to produce the email newsletter nearly every month. ECO-PB board has discussed the format and frequency because it is not easy to get text in time, but in the end decided to go on with the current format and frequency of publishing.

#### *1st Symposium November 2002*

ECO-PB first symposium was successfully held at the Humboldt University in Berlin from 21-22 November 2002 with the title: Organic Seed Production and Plant Breeding – strategies, problems and perspectives. It was opened by Alexander Müller, the German State Secretary of the Ministry of Consumer Protection, Food and Agriculture under attendance of some 100 participants from throughout Europe. Besides oral presentations also a poster presentation gave a good overview of the main issues on this topic. It gave an opportunity to a wider circle of involved scientists, breeders, and farmers involved in organic seed production and breeding.

#### *Proceedings*

In spring 2003 the proceedings of above mentioned symposium was published being an excellent network book. 350 hard copies were printed, and after being sold out the proceedings will be available on the ECO-PB website as pdf-file. In December 2003 there were 32 copies left.

#### *Frankfurt workshop on the EU-Organic Seed Regime 2004, 10-11 April 2003*

ECO-PB is an active network supporting the production and use of organic seeds. It sees the European Union's Organic Seed Regime as potentially a great step forward in the development of organic seed but is concerned about the latest discussions regarding implementation per January 1st 2004.

At the beginning of the year, the European Commission proposals seemed to allow a great deal of room for derogations. Seed companies were indicating that this year (2003) their organic seed sales have already dropped. Growers are aware of that the probable new rules will allow derogations even for those crops for which there is sufficient, appropriate organic seeds. A number of key seed companies have announced they will definitely stop their organic programmes, as it becomes financially unviable, should the criteria for derogations remain unclear and if derogations remain possible for all crops irrespective of availability. That is a real threat and would be a great setback for ongoing efforts to build up a healthy organic seed sector and hence further close the organic production chain. Furthermore, we have received much feedback about national authorities that are tentative about how to tackle the national implementation of the new seed regulation.

ECO-PB therefore decided to organise at short notice a workshop on the organic seed regime 2004 to help clarify the above issues. We aimed to facilitate an international discussion with key national players to exchange valuable information and concerns, and to establish common points of view on the organic seed regime in the organic sector on international level. The workshop aimed to tie into discussions held and decisions made in the Article 14 Committee of the European Commission on April 4-6.

With 20 participants from 10 countries a constructive meeting resulted in proposals for a) criteria for a proper running database, b) criteria for composing an expert group, c) criteria for appropriate sub groups of crops and d) criteria for derogation. The conclusions were written down in a declaration and send to the European Commission.

A report of the meeting is available, see [http://www.eco-pb.org/09/report\\_workshop03.pdf](http://www.eco-pb.org/09/report_workshop03.pdf)

#### *Brussels workshop on the EU-Organic Seed Regime 2004, 8 and 9 December 2003*

In a follow-up workshop of the ECO-PB workshop in Frankfurt in April 2003 on the organic seed regime 2004, ECO-PB will organise a second workshop in December 2003 to compare and discuss the various results of activities in several countries adopting the EU Regulation 1452/2003. One of the goals is to set steps towards possible agreements between (groups of) countries concerning criteria and development of 'national' annex's.

#### *Presentation at the ECP/GR meeting in Izmir Turkey 22-25 October*

ECO-PB was invited to be an observer at the meeting of the Steering Committee of the European Cooperative Programme for Crop Genetic Resources Networks (ECP/GR) Edith Lammerts van Bueren gave a presentation on the activities around and needs for genetic resources within the organic sector. For the organic sector it is important to be involved because many European programmes for crop genetic resources want to focus more on in-situ/on-farm conservation and not only on ex-situ conservation. For more information: [www.ecpgr.cgiar.org](http://www.ecpgr.cgiar.org)

#### *Participating in an EU-Community programme on the conservation, characterisation, collection and utilisation of genetic resources in agriculture*

During the ECP/GR meeting contacts have been established with representatives of the European Commission in Brussels for the upcoming Community programme on the conservation, characterisation, collection and utilisation of genetic resources in agriculture. The idea is to bring together the potential partners from the organic sector together in a joint project. Initiative for co-ordination of an organic proposal has been taken by Cornelia Wiethaler (D) and Edith Lammerts van Bueren (Louis Bolk Institute/NL).

#### *COST proposal: Varietal characteristics and crop diversity for low-input cereal production*

Hanne Østergård (DK) presented the idea of setting up a COST proposal during last ECO-PB GA. She has taken initiative to co-ordinate the COST proposal: Sustainable low-input cereal production: required varietal characteristics and crop diversity (SUSVAR). It seems that this project will be accepted. It can contribute to the European collaboration on organic cereal production among

researchers, breeders, advisors and farmers, and the exchange of knowledge between organic and conventional low-input systems.

*COST proposal: Improving organic seed production and quality*

At the Berlin symposium dr Steven P.C.Groot/ Wageningen Seed Centre of Wageningen University and Research Centre, together with Edith Lammerts van Bueren proposed a COST proposal: Improving organic seed production and quality. A new revised proposal might be prepared.

*Presentation of ECO-PB for the foundation of ECO-AB*

Edith Lammerts van Bueren, chair of ECO-PB, was invited to give a presentation on ECO-PB's activities and organisation in an international meeting on organic animal breeding in Driebergen (NL) on October 17 and 18. This group is considering a similar association on European level following the example of ECO-PB. The European Consortium for Organic Animal Breeding (ECO-AB) will stimulate international networking, lobby and support for research. More information by Wietze Nauta: w.nauta@louisbolk.nl

*First World Conference on Organic Seed 5-7 July, Rome*

*Challenges and Opportunities for the Organic Sector and the Seed Industry*

ECO-PB was invited to support and be part of the organisation of a world organic seed conference. Together with FAO and the International Seed Federation (ISF), IFOAM as the international umbrella organisation for organic agriculture movements will organise an international conference on organic seed production. The conference will be on 5-7 July 2004 at the FAO Headquarters. This conference is not on organic plant breeding issues but is restricted to the organic seed production.

It is intended for all the relevant stakeholders of the organic seed sector: scientists/plant breeders, seed producers, farmers, certifiers, governments and other stakeholders interested in organic farming and seed production. The goals of the conference are to create a platform for international information and knowledge exchange between the organic movement and the conventional seed sector focus on scientific/technical aspects related to organic seed issues evaluate regulatory requirements and related issues for organic seed provide a platform for networking and co-operation.

More information: [www.organicseedconf.org](http://www.organicseedconf.org) or email: [seedconference@ifoam.org](mailto:seedconference@ifoam.org).

*Future activities*

ECO-PB will come out with an updated leaflet on the ECO-PB organisation. A third workshop on the organic Seed regime is requested by the participants of the second workshop in Brussels, and will be planned for October 2004. A workshop on organic plant breeding strategies will be prepared for the end of the year.