



EU Seed policy and legislation

Challenges for Producers, Consumers and Citizens:

“Who will own the seeds?”

European Agriculture and Consumer Policy Conference

Venue: Residence Palace – International Press Centre, Brussels (tbc)

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Organized by **Demeter International** in co-operation with:

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1. Background information

The current situation in Europe (not to speak about developing countries) in the area of organic seed and organic varieties availability for farmers and organic seed production is challenging or even dramatic.

Since several years, the European Union is working on the revision of the EU seed legislation. On 6 May 2013 the Commission presented its first draft for a new regulation on the marketing of seeds [COM (2013) 262] for consultation within the European Parliament and the European Council. The new regulation is supposed to substitute 12 EU-directives and their implementation in Member States and contains stricter conditions and the further standardization of seeds. The legislation commoditizes seeds and even exchange of seeds will be restricted, i.e. life and the base of our food becomes more and more a part of the current market rules. For the distribution of a multitude of locally adapted, rare and old vegetable, fruit and grain varieties this regulation could signify bureaucratic and financial barriers that will be very difficult to overcome. But also the market access for new bred organic varieties may get more complicated after the centralization process. The Agricultural Committee of the European Parliament will probably vote on the Commission's proposal in January or February 2014 and some months later in the Plenary in Strasbourg before there will be a final decision in the European Council. Regarding this time schedule it is of great importance that stakeholders and citizens will unify their efforts now to lobby the European Institutions.

In spite of the financial crises the trend of liberalism is unbroken. The tendency to commercialize seeds in free market economies often ignores public health, biodiversity, ethical aspects and common interests. Small-scale farmers and SMEs are in conflict with government policies which mainly favor global industries. An important question is finally who is taking care of the interests of civil society, citizens of organic farmers and consumers?

In former times seeds were common goods, exchanged and traded locally, developed by farmers and cooperatives. Since global trade and business accelerated, big companies identified the opportunity to privatize more and more seed production mainly with the argument of high yielding seed varieties. They claim that the only solution to feed the next billion of people will work on global market liberalism and on high-tech investments.

However, genetically uniform high yielding varieties could not solve the hunger problem worldwide. In many cases, they could not adapt to the local conditions and needed high input of fertilizers and pesticides. Moreover, they caused heavy losses in biodiversity worldwide.

Therefore organic, biodynamic and traditional farming plant breeders try to develop varieties which fulfil the needs of and are adapted to local, low-input, organic and sustainable production. Considerable breeding progress was achieved in the last decades with regard to organic cereals breeding whereas there is still a lot of work to accomplish in organic vegetable and fodder crop breeding. A very promising approach is breeders and farmers research collaboration (participatory breeding).

With regard to EU and national legislation, the registration and certification of a new cultivar is a main obstacle for organic and small-scale breeding as it is complex, costly and hampers local interests. Does the currently proposed legislation promote only the interests of large industries at the cost of seeds as "common" good which could serve much better the interests of the population?

The current Plant Reproductive Material (PRM) legislation, revised and proposed last May by the European Commission, sets out the rules for the marketing of seeds and other propagation materials. The Commission tried for sure to formulate a flexible European legal framework, but there is the big question, whether the responsible authorities in the Member States will implement it in a way that it will be appropriate for all the activists in the sector? There are already a lot of conflicts of interests and discussions about this new law proposal, which is now debated in the European Parliament. Will it benefit or hamper biodiversity, social and environmental sustainability, food security and the choices and transparency for citizens?

Another obstacle is that organic breeding companies due to the local approach have smaller budgets for research and development and approaching smaller markets. Seeds and health of seeds should be not a question of economies of scale and marketing. New models should be established to balance inequalities in the market. Seeds and health have an important ethical impact.

An important issue in this context is also the question of biodiversity loss and loss of genetic diversity with regard to cultivated global varieties. How could citizens and civil society who are interested that biodiversity is maintained in food production contribute to its realization? How can we establish societal and economic models that allow safeguarding biodiversity in seeds as a cultural heritage of mankind independent of current market mechanism and respect the ethics of life? Seeds should be a part of the common of the local human society due to the fact that seeds are maybe efficient in one region but will not work similar in another. Seeds in their natural expression are a part of the local environment and cannot automatically spread over Europe like iPhones.

As conclusion, laws and regulations should only regulate big corporations as long as they do not eliminate smaller farmers, smaller breeders and private gardeners from the market. Although, small farmers, gardeners and small producers are still the majority even in the EU, the current legislation is designed to treat them as the exception in a niche market. However, t h e y maintain biodiversity and local cultivation. There is a danger that high costs of administration will lead to the elimination of small producers and farmers which have no European wide but local interest.

Therefore let's free the seeds for enhanced biodiversity and support small and medium sized breeders and farmers!

2. Main conference objectives

Thus the specific conference aims are:

- to raise political awareness that seeds are not only private property but also a subject of the Commons
- to discuss and elaborate appropriate EU and national legislation
- of the necessity of freedom of free seeds for European countries
- that big seed production companies should be regulated and not small ones
- create awareness of registration and certification problems in the organic sector and possible solutions
- to motivate everybody to be engaged in our origin of food and its influence of health
- why seed is a local matter and not a global one
- why seed is not always an issue of a market but an issue of common interest, ethics and life
- to discuss the citizens' perspective to be engaged in the food and seed process
- to discuss potential and best practice models of shared responsibility among breeders, companies, farmers and citizens (i.e. all stakeholders of the food chain)
- to discuss the possible need of a European Citizens' Initiative concerning seeds

Target Group

The conference addresses particularly representatives of the European Parliament, the European Commission as well as stakeholders and interest groups in Brussels and from European Member States which are active in the field of European agricultural policy and especially European seed legislation. It addresses stakeholders, NGOs and citizens who are willing to join forces to create a "Citizens' seed movement" which is active on the EU and national level.

3. Preliminary Conference program

8:30 Registration

9:00 Opening and Welcoming

Andreas Biesantz (Demeter International, EU Liaison Office)

MEP Sergio Silvestris (Rapporteur for Seed Legislation, European Parliament, Committee on Agriculture, tbc)

Päivi Mannerkorpi (European Commission, DG SANCO, Head of Sector Material for Plant Reproduction, tbc)

MEP Nikos Chrysogelos (The Greens/ EFA)

9.30 Keynote speech - Hannah Townsend (writer of the article "Save our Seeds")

9.50 Gebhard Rossmannith (Bingenheimer Saatgut AG and Kultursaat e.V., Germany): "Revision of the EU seed legislation - Chances and Risks for organic breeding – e.g. development of biodynamic vegetable varieties"

10.05 Antje Kölling (IFOAM EU Group, Brussels): "Current European legislation and its consequences for the organic seed sector"

10.20 Pierre Sultana (Arche Noah, Austria): "Current European legislation and its consequences for biodiversity"

10.35 Discussion

Moderation: Arie van den Brand (tbc), Groupe de Bruges

11.00 Coffee break

11.30 Silke Helfrich (author and expert on the "Commons", Germany): "Commons vs. commodities – a new framework for seed handling"

12.00 Edith Lammerts van Bueren (Wageningen University, Louis Bolk Institute and ECO-PB, The Netherlands): "Seed Research and Development, state of the art, participatory research"

12.20 Discussion

Moderation: Arie van den Brand (tbc), Groupe de Bruges

12.50 Presenting the 4 working groups for the afternoon session

13.00 Lunch

14.00 Working groups 1-4

Working group 1: "Legal aspects and its consequences for the organic seed sector and biodiversity"

Working group leaders: Antje Kölling (IFOAM EU Group) and Panagiotis Sainatoudis (founder of the alternative community "Peliti", Greece, tbc)

Working group 2: "Economic aspects and needs for the organic seed sector – especially for smaller organizations, farmers and individuals"

Working group leader: Guy Kastler (Semences Paysannes, France), Amadeus Zschunke (Sativa Rheinau AG, Switzerland), Karl Josef Mueller (Biodynamic cereal breeder, Germany)

Working group 3: "Seeds as a common and property rights"

Working group leaders: Stefan Doeblin (Network Economy Group, Brussels) and Silke Helfrich

Working group 4: "Citizens' and farmers' participation"

Working group leaders: Véronique Chable (INRA, France), Andreas Biesantz and Carsten Berg (Expert for European Citizens' Initiatives), Ueli Hurter (Head of the Biodynamic Section at the Goetheanum, Switzerland and organizer of "Sowing the future")

16.00 Coffee break

16.30 Plenary: Presentation of working group results, open discussion and main conclusions

Moderation: Arie van den Brand (tbc), Groupe de Bruges

- How to establish a European Seed legislation which covers the interests of all producers (big companies and SMEs) and citizens (freedom of choice)
- The "Commons" as a basis to increase local economies and employment
- Organic seed production and biodiversity: obstacles and possible solutions?
- How could future common models to finance organic breeding look like?
- How could civil society and citizens be involved in supporting organic breeding and safeguarding seeds as cultural heritage?

17.30 Final keynote speech of MEP Martin Häusling (The Greens/EFA)

17.50 Closing the conference: Andreas Biesantz (Demeter International)

Speakers' and Working group leaders' biographies

Carsten Berg – Alanus University, Bonn-Alfter, Germany

He is a trained Political Scientist and obtained a degree in Political Sciences from the University of Potsdam and an MA in Education from the Alanus University Bonn-Alfter. He is an expert in the area of European Citizens' Initiatives (ECI).

Andreas Biesantz - Demeter International, Brussels

He is the representative of Demeter International at the EU Institutions and Head of Brussels' EU Liaison Office.

Véronique Chable - French National Institute for Agricultural Research INRA, France

Her main research activities are focused on participatory research (researchers and farmers) for cultivated diversity in organic breeding and low input agriculture.

Nikos Chrysogelos – MEP, The Greens/ EFA

Ecologist Greens MEP, Vice-president 4th Regional Development (REGI) and alternate Member of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) in the European Parliament.

Stefan Doebelin - Network Economy Group, Brussels

He is a serial entrepreneur and the founder and chairman of the Network Economy Group. Currently he is engaged in renewable energy projects in different European countries.

Martin Häusling – MEP, The Greens/EFA

German politician who has served as MEP for the Greens since 2009. Before entering politics, he managed his family's 75 hectare organic farm near Kassel in Hesse. He was elected to the Landtag of Hesse in 2003.

Silke Helfrich – Author and activist on the Commons, Jena, Germany

She studied romance languages and pedagogy at the Karl-Marx-University in Leipzig. Since mid-1990s she is an activist in the field of development politics. Co-founder on the "Commons Strategies group". Primary author of the German speaking CommonsBlog

Ueli Hurter –Biodynamic Agriculture and "Sowing the future", Aubier, Switzerland

He is the head of the Agricultural Section at the Goetheanum in Dornach, Switzerland and a biodynamic farmer.

Guy Kastler - Réseau Semences Paysannes, France

He is a French farmer, chairman of the Réseau Semences Paysannes (Peasants' Seeds Network) and a member of the Confédération Paysanne (Farming Confederation).

Antje Kölling - IFOAM EU Group, Brussels

She works for the IFOAM EU Group since summer 2009. She is responsible to coordinate the work in the areas of Common Agriculture Policy, biodiversity, GMOs, climate change and environmental aspects of agriculture.

Edith Lammerts van Bueren - Wageningen University, the Netherlands

Prof. Edith T. Lammerts van Bueren has more than 25 years of experience in organic

research and management. She is a pioneer in plant breeding and genetic resources for organic, low-input agriculture.

Karl Josef Müller - Biodynamic cereal breeder, Darzau, Germany

He is member of the Association of Biodynamic Plant Breeders. He has been breeding for high quality grains in low-input organic systems since 1989.

Gebhard Rossmannith - Bingenheimer Saatgut AG, Germany

Chief executive officer of the organic seed company Bingenheimer Saatgut AG in Germany since 12 years. He worked before for 20 years as a professional biodynamic vegetable grower in different areas.

Panagiotis Sainatoudis - founder of the alternative community "Peliti", Greece (tbc)

Pierre Sultana - Arche Noah, Belgium

Pierre Sultana was born in 1984 and grew up in a French farm. He studied EU and WTO laws at the University Rennes, France. Arche Noah is a society which works for the preservation of biodiversity of cultivated plants and their development.

Hannah Townsend – writer, Devon, UK

Hannah Townsend is the writer of the article "Save Our Seeds" published in the journal "New View". She grew up on a small family farm in Devon, UK. She is a regular contributor to the journal New View.

Amadeus Zschunke - Sativa Rheinau AG, Switzerland

He is the director of Sativa Rheinau AG, a Swiss seed company dedicated to 100% organic and biodynamic seeds.