

# Report 3<sup>rd</sup> Workshop on the EU Organic Seed Regime

**Vienna, Austria**  
**Bundesministerium für Land-, Forstwirtschaft,  
Umwelt und Wasserwirtschaft**  
**A-1010 Wien, Stubenring 12 (6<sup>th</sup> Floor, room No. 626)**

**Friday 4<sup>th</sup> November 2005, 9.00 - 16.30**

## **Opening and Introduction by the President of ECO-PB, Edith Lammerts van Bueren**

Edith Lammerts van Bueren welcomes everybody to this third workshop which has been organized in collaboration with the IFOAM EU Regional Group. The IFOAM EU Regional Group supports an harmonisation with regard to the organic seed use within the European countries.

Special thanks to Gerhard Plakolm and Elisabeth Fromm who have managed the organization here in Vienna. Special thanks also to the ministry that made it possible to meet here.

It is a special pleasure that new European countries are with us e.g. Poland and Latvia, Latvia as one of the Baltic states is very active with regard to organic farming and also in regard to organic seed.

Following the two previous ECO-PB workshops on the EU organic seed regime in 2003, ECO-PB will organise this third workshop to discuss the various activities in several countries which have adopted and still have to adopt the EU Regulation 1452/2003. The issues to be dealt with in this workshop are:

- The first year after implementing EU Reg. 1452/2003 has passed and countries (should) have reported back on their implementation of the organic seed regulation in 2004. That gives a concrete base for discussion.
- Some countries are worried about the slow progress in gradually overcoming the derogation system and about the fact that some seed companies are withdrawing. More cooperation and bi-lateral (informal) agreements between countries about certain species on a “regional annexes” and/or “national annexes” would stimulate the progress which in turn requires an international round table discussion (see the attached example of a pilot study in the Netherlands).
- New European Members States and candidates need to prepare to adopt the provisions for organic seed in the EU Regulation. This process of adoption gives rise for discussion.
- The EU Commission needs to think about a European Annex by mid July 2006. Therefore a workshop on the European seed regime might fit well in their preparations.
- The EU Commission has already started revising the regulation. What will the impact of that with regard to organic seed be?

**Results and experiences regarding the current EU organic seed regime**

A brief presentation of different EU Member States on reports to the Commission according Art. 12 and 13 of Reg. 1452/2003, and plans for implementation of the EU organic seed regime in "new" EU Member States respectively are given by the participants.

**France:** Jean Whorer, GNIS, in charge of the organic seed data base:

- Data base worked fine in the first year,
  - special interpretation with regard to derogations for certain species: farmers need to further explain why they cannot use organic seed,
- Jacques Caplat, FNAB, in charge of the French expert group
- there is a lack of technical information in the data base, as it is introduced e.g. in the database of organicXseeds,
  - big difference in the availability between vegetable and cereal varieties,
  - there are still many problems with the organic seed regime in France (delivery distances, prices...) but the expert group has solved the most important ones by the special explanation required, as Jean Wohrer has specified (for further details of the French data base see attached report),
  - still most important is not considered the data base but contact between farmers and seed supplier,
  - a better dialogue between farmers and supplier shall be established.

**Austria:** Sabine Eigenschink, Austria Bio Garantie and member of the IFOAM EU group:

- there are lacks with regard to the data base in Austria e.g. no vegetables in the data base,
- data base is not very user friendly and useful for inspection bodies and farmer equally,
- number of derogations in Austria might be high due to lacks in the data base,
- they tried to work with an equivalent list but didn't succeed in installing one.

**Switzerland:** Andi Thommen, FiBL Switzerland, in charge for the data base and derogations, involved in managing OrganicXseeds database.

- the Swiss system works fine for arable crops, but vegetable seeds are hardly mentioned on the database,
- especially good success with grass mixtures - started from zero to some hundred tones in 2005,
- the derogation system is based on an equivalent list.

**Spain:** Maria Ramos, works for the Andalusia organic farmers (=50% of the organic farms in Spain), collaborates with the government in order to further develop the Spanish data base.

- no national annex,
- 296 varieties, 43 species, 16 seed suppliers in the data base,
- in the Spanish report are some 3000 derogations: ca. 1000 on cereals, ca. 800 on vegetables,
- main reason: no appropriate variety, need for regional/local varieties,
- are going to do a survey on the demand of varieties in Spain,
- have done a survey in Andalusia with farmers; only 2% cereal seed is organically produced,
- main problems no suitable variety, no delivery in time.

**Italy:** Cristina Micheloni, AIAB

- data base is working for four years now,
- it is run by a governmental institution,
- no general derogation,

**Latvia:** Baiba Holcmane of the Ministry of agriculture, and Zinta Gaile of the Latvian Association of Organic Farming

- almost no organic certified seed yet in Latvia (operators are using organic home-saved seed or conventional seed),
- have to adopt provision of Reg. 1452/2003 in January 2006,
- trying to solve the problems till then.

**Belgium:** Lieven Delanote, PCBT, involved in the process of adopting the Regulation 1453/2003 in Belgium,

- main problem: Belgium data base is not yet properly filled with varieties, lack of competence for derogation system.

**Finnland:** Juha Kieksi, Plant production/Inspection centre, responsible for Finish seed data base.

- 1.5 million kg of organic seed,
- no vegetables in the data base,
- the data base has been available for some 4 years.

**Sweden:** Gunilla Ideström, Swedish Board of Agriculture

- there is an organic seed list available on the internet,
- set up process with farmers,
- organic seed portion is constantly rising, less derogations each year,
- problems especially with potato varieties,
- farmers can do small scale tests using new or otherwise interesting varieties with derogations.

**Netherlands:** Raoul Haegens, Naktuinbouw, database manager

- data base works fine,
- derogation problems with crops that are not on the national annex.

**Denmark:** Lena Tinghuus Danish Ministry and Inger Bertelsen, Advisor in Denmark, involved in setting up the data base in 2003

- Denmark has had lists on the internet before the data base was launched,
- problem: not sufficient assortment of vegetables in the database,
- rather good supply in arable crops, almost 100% in cereals.

**Switzerland:** Stefan Schönenberger, Swiss Federal Office for Agriculture, Section Promotion of Quality and Sales

- identical Regulation in Switzerland equivalent to the one in the EU,
- working together with FiBL, using organicXseeds,
- the system works very well,
- >95% of organic farmers producing under Bio Suisse label, providing more restrictive rules than the Swiss Bio Regulation,
- 394 derogations in 2004,
- declaration of grass mixtures has been a special issue.

**Germany:** Eckard Reiners, Bioland, private farmers association, member of the IFOAM Standards Committee

- the seed issue and how to use more organic seed is constantly under discussion,

- OrganicXseeds data base works very well,
  - points of discussion have been grass seed mixtures, seed quality, basic seed and how to proceed with the annex in the EU Regulation,
- Germany wishes to have the Annex on an European level and not a national approach.

**Poland:** Wieslaw Podyma, Ministry of Agriculture, plant breeding and plant protection,

- Poland has set up a list with providers of organic seed and information on seed material in Poland,
- in 2004 4 providers with 60 varieties,
- 120 different varieties in 2005 including seedlings,
- the number of organic farmers has doubled to 7000 farms, but still only 1% of the total acreage is under organic management,
- 20 ha land per farm on average in organic farming (7 ha in conventional farms),,
- 17 derogation in 2004,
- 1130 derogation in 2005,
- there have been negative decisions because it could be shown that organic seed has been available.

## **A discussion followed the presentations.**

Is price a reason for derogation? Officially not, but growers may escape high prices of organic seed by giving another reason used as an excuse, e.g. for high priced onion or carrot seed. On the other hand in Italy 40 % of organic cereal are sold in conventional channels. Seed price is also an issue in Switzerland since the difference in costs using organic seed might sum up e.g. to 5 cents per kg carrots. Sometimes, in weekly markets and direct market, the price increase can be passed to the consumer but often not. Therefore Bio Suisse (bud-label) in Switzerland a fund to even the price differences between organic and conventional seed has been set up. If a grower needs non-organic seed which is cheaper than organic he has to pay a comparable price to organic seed and the difference is put into that fund. The fund is used to support projects on organic breeding and multiplication. The fund has been in use so far for seeds of non-organic spelt.

For Jan Velema this sounds to be a very good idea but it works only on a national and private level.

In Austria the main reason for seeking a derogation is 'no appropriate variety'. Therefore in Austria it was tried to set up an equivalence list by an expert group to judge which varieties are equally appropriate, but didn't succeed. The farmers therefore are getting the derogation even when an equal appropriate variety might be organically available on the market because the inspection bodies fear to be sued in court when denying the use of non-organic seed. Another problem is that there is no data base but a pdf-list which is not really helpful in practice compared to data bases like OrganicXseeds. One problem of making such equivalence lists may be the fact that regions in some countries are fairly different with regard to the respective soil-climate-typ.

In the Netherlands there is also a list of exchangeable varieties among the (sub)species that are on the national annex. In that case, if one variety has been sold out growers are forced to use another comparable one. If the expert group feels that there is enough seed and an appropriate assortment of varieties for a crop or subspecies to cover all uses/cultivation periods, it is put on the national annex.

In Switzerland such an equivalence list has been made on private level especially with regard to professional growers. This system works fairly easy: The list of exchangeable (recommended)

varieties is printed every year and visible for the administrator who has to decide about derogation calls on the basis of this list of recommended varieties. But daily handling may not always be easy since some growers come up with a lot of reasons arguing for non-organic seed varieties.

For Jacques Caplat (F) this system seems to be very resource consuming. There should be other ways to raise the proportion of organic seed. A harmonisation within the given legal frame is almost impossible. There must for instance be standards for the use of varieties. But those standards might work well for cereals but not for vegetables.

For Cristina Micheloni (I) it is clear that big countries have many different regions. To set up a list of exchangeable varieties is a time and money consuming business. This time and money might be spent better for other tasks, breeding programs dedicated to OF, for example. Andi Thommen (CH) finds that the point of regions etc. is much overstressed. He reports from his practice in Switzerland that it did not take much time to decide which varieties are equivalent with respect to production area and market demands. The start is a bit time consuming, but the yearly changes are easy to handle.

In Denmark recommended variety lists are set up on the basis of surveys. For varieties that are on the list farmers need to have extremely good reasons to get a derogation. Varieties that are not suitable to be grown in the whole of Denmark are marked in the list. With arable crops it works well. But regarding vegetables it is not a good system since the assortment of varieties is too little.

Lieven Delanote (B) adds that the introduction of minimum percentages for organic seed use might also be a way to solve the problem. Such a stepwise going may rise the trust of seed suppliers in this market. Farmers in the Netherlands are also fond of such a percentage system but it is not in accordance with the regulation and therefore not acceptable for the authorities.

## **For the different presentations see also the attached report.**

- **Andreas Thommen, FiBL Switzerland:** Presentation of a survey concerning organic seed use of cereal in selected countries

- **Klaus-Peter Wilbois, FiBL Germany:** Current situation regarding organic seed databases in selected EU Member States

- **Jan Velema, Vitalis Organic Seeds-NL:** Experiences of seed companies producing organic seed  
The presentation of Jan Velema is mostly about vegetables. There was a review on organic seed compiled by the European Seed Association, ESA, made in 2003. The conclusion of the ESA survey was that enough seed is available from 2004 on provided that the rules are strict enough. But after implementing the European seed regulation derogations have been the rule not the exemption. There are different groups of suppliers. i) Conventional companies that only react if the rules are strict enough to make money in this business. And ii) the specialised producers of organic seed which substantially developed the organic seed supply.

In his opinion the main effect of the introduction of the organic seed regulation in 2004 was that the awareness of the growers to use organic seed has increased.

He produces 250 different varieties of 30 different vegetable crops. His view on the development of the organic seed market is critical but still optimistic for the future. One thing is clear: The progress must come from the organic sector and not from the regulation. For conclusion see the presentation in the report.

- **Maaïke Raaijmakers, Biologica-NL:** Presentation of a Dutch pilot study on the use and the production of organic seeds in the Netherlands (see also attached word document)
- **Ute Rönnebeck, Ministry of Agriculture Northrhine-Westphalia, Germany:** Presentation of results of a stake holder consultation process in Germany
- **Edith Lammerts van Bueren, Louis Bolk Institute-NL:** Introducing the instrument of national/regional annexes as a major step towards a common EU-annex
- **Zinta Gaile, Latvia University of Agriculture:** Challenges faced by the new EU Member States adopting the EU organic seed provisions

## Plenary discussion to identify action points

In a thorough plenary discussion the main topics to be dealt with were identified and addressed. Only the action points that have been agreed on by all participants were written down. The points were displayed by means of a video projector and discussed amongst the participants point by point. MS = member states; COM = EU commission.

- Technical topics
  - update the web page of the EU (COM);
  - improve data bases (MS, COM), can get help from countries that have a good data base;
  - improve reporting, make reports publicly available, a common format for reports acc. to Art. 12, 13 of the Reg. 1452/2003 shall be compiled (MS, COM);
  - set harmonised threshold levels for seed transmitted diseases;
  - what is *research*? Different countries have different interpretations for derogation in case of research → includes on-farm-variety-trials in a reasonable quantity is our interpretation (max. reference should be set);;
  - grass mixtures, legal problem with mixtures of seed, write a letter to the commission to employ the 70%-approach which is in line with Art. 5 of Reg. 2092/91;
  - list vegetative material (e.g. trees) in the MS data base on voluntary basis.
- Problems concerning EU annex
  - Some of the participants propose to fill in the EU annex 1 but leaving out reasons 5, 1 (d) if agreed upon in the EU (revision of 1452/2003) to make an EU annex a bit more flexible. Other participants hold the view that there is no crop for which an EU wide supply with organically propagated seed regarding the quantity and the number of varieties is given;
  - ask the commission to change the conditions on the annex before it is filled (COM, flexible, exemptions for calamities and on-farm variety trials);
  - as a possible next step there can be commitments on a private level between two or several states for certain crops to use 100% / 90% organic seed with deadlines in time (valid for main producing areas/countries per crop) (private bodies);
  - take the issue of organic seed up to the organic revision project;
  - it might be useful to build up national equivalence lists, make them public as a tool for the advisory services and inspection body (private bodies);
  - build up a dialogue system in each country between farmers and seed suppliers (incl. feed back system on the use and the need of organic seed/varieties);
  - feed back results of the usage of organic seed for the different (relevant) crops (percentage) (private initiative, organic revision shall advocate for an improved comparability between reports).
- Report on achievements
  - clear analyses what the problems are, together with proposed solutions (priv. bodies, MS);

- need to convince more suppliers to produce and to feed in seed offer in the national data bases in the different countries (private bodies, MS);
  - encourage organic seed multiplication and organic breeding initiatives producing local, regional, conservation varieties (MS);
  - increase demand and supply of organic seed, show added value of organic seed (MS);
  - remind the commission that the regulation shall be properly implemented in all MS (harmonisation of interpretation especially with regard to derogation requests).
- Communication to the Commission
    - Write a letter with tasks for commission as mentioned above (proposal to be agreed upon by e-mail).

Report: Klaus-Peter Wilbois