



ECO:PB

*European
Consortium for
Organic Plant Breeding*

**Short Report
on the
2nd Workshop on the new Organic Seed Regime**

**Brussels
8 to 9 December 2003**

**By
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Short Report on the 2nd ECO-PB Workshop on EU organic seed regime held in Brussels on 8 to 9 December 2003

As a follow-up workshop of the ECO-PB workshop in Frankfurt in April 2003 on the organic seed regime 2004, ECO-PB has carried out a second meeting held in Brussels. The objectives were to compare and discuss the various results of activities in several countries adopting the EU Regulation 1452/2003 (e. g. set up national lists of species which sufficiently available and for which therefore probably no authorisations will be needed for the coming season or species for which still hardly any seed is available and general derogations are necessary). Since several countries have undertaken activities to achieve such national lists and criteria for segmentation of categories, species and subspecies to properly implement the provision of the EU Organic Seed Regulation. Therefore, ECO-PB felt that it was necessary to back up such processes by organising a workshop before the 1. January, when the new regulation enters into force in the EU. For the delegates from different European countries the workshop provided the chance to discuss and where appropriate to coordinate national steps to support the adoption of the new seed regime.

State of the art in different European countries

In the first session of the workshop the current state of the art in the different European countries concerning national databases and national derogation systems for 2004 is given (see http://www.eco-pb.org/09/annex_contributions.pdf) Afterwards, Maarten Zwaan presented the position of the European Seed Association (see http://www.eco-pb.org/09/esa_maarten_zwaan.pdf)

Meeting with the commission representative

In Monday's final session the participants discussed the issues with Per Ahle of the EU Commission. Per Ahle welcomed the action taken by ECO-PB to organise workshops on the issue of future seed regime.

One interesting point was what happens when Member States do not establish a functioning database with regard to the first of January next year. It is the Commission's opinion that there can not be derogations without a database in place. Greece, Portugal and Ireland have not shown activities as yet that they will have a database on the first of January.

In order to fill the Annex of Regulation 1452/2003 reports after the a year with running databases shall be evaluated for decision making.

The Commission is thinking of a procedure to react on calamities that hamper seed availability drastically to be included in the provisions of the seed regulation.

A discussion with regard to member states reports showed that there may be some information lost because general derogations are given with no obligation of precise information on the use of non-organic seed. In order to render reports comparable in the major requirements the Commission is thinking of releasing a general scheme that can be used to fill in the requested information by the different member states. Furthermore, the point in time for delivering the reports to the EU Commission might be tighter in the future. Therefore, the Commission is thinking of having stricter delivery rules for reports.

The question how inspection bodies can decide on the 'appropriateness' of a variety is also a point of discussion. It may be a good idea for an expert group to classify reasons for case-by-case derogations in order to support inspection authorities to make decisions on applications for a permit.

On the second workshop day the country delegates discussed the implementation in of the new organic seed and derogation regime in the different countries. In an plenary discussion, criteria to handle authorisation to use not organically produced seed were summarized in three different cases:

General derogation: No (suitable or appropriate) varieties are available in the species or subspecies concerned. This group is important in order to limit bureaucracy.

Case-by-case authorisation: Some (suitable / appropriate) varieties of the respective species or subspecies are available; clear argumentation is needed to get authorisation for using non-organic seed. This group should not be too big as it causes a lot of bureaucracy. A proposal could be: only allow a (sub)species on this list if at least one of the main varieties is on the market in organic quality.

Annex 1: Usually, enough appropriate varieties of the respective species (for the main climate, regional and market/culture use differences) are available. The species (or subspecies) is listed in a national annex or in future in annex 1 of regulation 1452/2003. Provision to handle calamities that hamper seed availability are necessary.

Future perspectives with regard to the implementation of Reg. 1452/2003 in the different Member States

After the discussion of several points participants agreed that the representatives of each country shall give a brief explanation what their country is going to do in the coming year to tackle the issue of organic seed and the seed regulation.

Spain, Maria Ramos

In January 2004 there will be a database in Spain. Then a survey is done in Spain to estimate the availability and the use of varieties by farmers and vegetable growers. By the end of 2004, a decision on seed which can be put on the annex shall be made for 2005. The umbrella organisation is going to ask the government to build up an expert group that is going to prepare decisions. Information exchange between the organic sector and the government shall be improved especially for the criteria for derogations. A register of local varieties in agriculture use shall be established. The umbrella organisation seeks contact with farmer cooperatives to produce more organic cereal seed. Furthermore, it will ask for more commitment for organic agriculture with regard to the organic action plan in Spain.

Switzerland, Andi Thommen

The derogation criteria will be given by FiBL for Biosuisse producers. The handling of derogation will be medium restrictive for 2004 but strong in developing clear criteria for derogation after a first year of running the database. The criteria shall be published, every farmer should be able to know about it. The lists and classifications shall be updated every four months for vegetables and once a year for arable crops by four expert groups. Improvement shall be made on the basis of the annual report. Improvement of the supply of organic seed through projects with retailers etc. will be set up. A better planning of Swiss seed production is needed. An overview of amounts of certified seed shall be surveyed. Better information shall be given on the basis of variety trials especially for vegetables.

With regard to a price harmonising system, a steering fee for the use of conventional seed shall be developed in 2004. Further projects on vegetative propagated material (trees etc) shall be addressed next, esp. on quality control.

Grass mixtures: The goal is to raise the percentage from now 30 to 50 by weight in the beginning of 2005. The multipliers promised to start multiplication of Swiss varieties esp. for grasses and red clover.

Netherlands, Louis Beijer

With regard to the database, Holland will have a national database from the 1st of January 2004 on.

An expert meeting making an new annex for 2005 shall be prepared using the experience from 2003 when a first annex for 2004 was set up and the experiences of the first 6 months of 2004 with the dutch national annex.

A prospect for the long term (2006/2007) should be produced with regard especially vegetables. Based on the knowledge of availability, Holland is intending to establish a more efficient and strict derogation system for 2005. Clear criteria shall be set up for case-by-case derogation requests.

The Netherlands strives to make coalitions between groups of countries about the status of certain species in order to harmonize national legislation systems with the Dutch approach as an example.

Two more projects are planned to be carried out by the Louis Bolk Institute:

Bringing together farmers and experts to choose on the right assortment.

To build up a more efficient variety trial scheme combining conventional and organic tests in a way that relevant data can be achieved with a minimum of financial input.

Norway, Etti Salomonsen

The organic sector will continue with the list that has been put on the internet until the Norwegian database is running. The database will be ready in February 2004. Efforts shall be made in a continued increase of the supply of organic seeds that meet the farmers needs. With regard to vegetables and herbs a meeting in January shall be held with seed companies. A defined timescale for the delivering of seeds by seed companies shall be developed.

A special problem of Norway is the climatic region. There shall be a division in regions with similar climatic conditions. If there is enough seed for the respective region farmers will be obliged to use it.

With regard to grant general derogations there must be a definition of criteria for quality etc beforehand which can be derived from research results. Case-by-case authorisation will be given by inspection bodies being in dialog with expert groups. An evaluation of actions between 2001 – 2004 is being made and a new action plan shall be implemented by expert groups.

Denmark, Rasmus Ørnberg Eriksen

The Danish database will be active in spring 2004 displaying all seed for arable crops, vegetables and vegetatively propagated material that is on the market. The database includes information about quality (diseases) of seeds, especially for cereals. The amount of available arable crop seed is displayed in the database.

Expert groups will evaluate every variety within arable and vegetable crops and for potatoes. In 2004 Denmark will gather information about derogations in the situation where organic seed is available. Giving information on varieties and amounts of non-organic seed used in

practise. With that and the information of former years there will be a good picture of the usage and the need of organic seed in Denmark.

In cooperation with companies and the farmers in Denmark tries to increase the production of appropriate varieties. Experiences from practice in order to decide on appropriateness can be used too instead of only field trials. From 2006 on there should be more appropriate varieties especially for vegetables.

With regard to research: Within DARCOF there are projects on the characteristics of varieties for organic agriculture, seed health, co-existence with GMO and variety testing especially for cereals, grasses and other fodder crops.

France, Oliver Ranke and Jean Wohrer

For France the database is an opportunity to make clear what the market of organic seed is. The database shall be working from January 2004 on. France is going to convince suppliers to put their offer in the database gaining a much better offer of seed for growers in the database. Links to other national databases shall be made. Please let us know!

The management of derogations shall be clarified in a meeting with the authorities, farmers and inspection bodies in December. In the first year there shall be a flexible response when farmers ask for derogations. The analyses of given derogations shall be done at the end of 2004. Then, we will see what the situation is.

France commits itself to send the annual report in due time to the EU Commission. A prepared scheme with the basic layout from the commission is welcome for preparing it in a proper way.

The installation of expert groups shall be done in 2004. There will be no national annex for 2004 and probably no one for 2005 for farmers resist to that. Farmers without internet access shall be supported in getting derogations by the inspection bodies within ten days after request, and the buying of seeds must be done by the farmer within one month after request (all before sowing).

Research: A lot has been done on organic seed production. There is work going on to breed varieties especially for organic agriculture (one breeder for wheat and one for herb). INRA is doing some research work with links to organic agriculture.

Belgium, Lieven Delanote

In 2004 organicXseeds (oXs) will be available as the official database. This is the main tool for stimulation the offer of organic seed. The implementation of the regulation shall be accompanied by gathering information on seed supply and demand. There shall be actions to make oXs the main information tool for farmers having information on seed in it. This should be taken as a stimulation for suppliers to put in their offer. At the end of 2004 there shall be a look how far Belgium has come.

A three-step-model shall be developed. It is still open whether a national annex shall be employed. Clear criteria shall be developed with regard to granting derogations. The first year of running the database will be an experimental one.

Special problem for Belgium is that they depend mainly on seed supply from abroad. Belgium strives for a common standpoint of Wallonia and Flanders in this question.

Germany, Klaus-Peter Wilbois

OrganicXseeds of FiBL will be used as the official database, starting in January 2004. Derogations shall be given on a crop group basis with case-by-case derogations for those crops where the availability is in range between medium and good. General derogation is given where the availability of organic seed in a crop group is still low and insufficient. The decision making takes into account whether important varieties are available. General derogation should be tracked in the database collecting information on the acreage and the needed amount of conventional seed.

An expert group meeting shall be held in 2004 to decide on crop groups for general authorisation with regard to 2005. Therefore, also the data gathered through the running of the database shall be taken into account. As it seems, German federal states favour the idea of making a 'national annex'.

All present countries commit themselves that they will do their very best to send reports made in a complete and comprehensive way in due time to the EU Commission. Participants all agreed to report regularly on efforts and achievements with regard to the new organic seed regime in their countries in the ECO-PB Newsletter during 2004.

Further issues

The problem how to tackle mixtures with non-organic components was raised but could not fully be discussed in workshop. It was decided that a proposal for this shall be produced to be conveyed to the EU Commission.

Another point of interest is seed quality beyond the normal, legal standards. Beyond the scope of legal seed standards there are usually further requirements employed by organic farmers especially for cereals and potatoes. Attendees are convinced that this point needs attention. The EU-Commission shall be asked to commission a study to find out what the situation is with regard to the requirements in the different Member States.

In the closing session the attendees were grateful for having this exchange of experiences and positions and asked ECO-PB to organise a third meeting on the issue of organic seed regime, preferably in October 2004.