

Progress in the establishment of AEGIS



Since June 2008 a number of significant events and developments have taken place with respect to the establishment process of AEGIS. A meeting of the AEGIS Model Crops (*Allium*, *Avena*, *Brassica* and *Prunus*) curators and database managers took place in Radzików, Poland on 1-3 July to discuss key aspects of their progress, such as the identification of Most Appropriate Accessions (MAAs) and the establishment of an AEGIS Quality System. These experiences were then reported during the 11th ECPGR Steering Committee (SC) meeting, which took place on 2-5 September in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. An entire session of the SC meeting was dedicated to AEGIS. The main outcomes of that meeting are reported on pages 1 and 3 of this issue.

Major agreements and developments that resulted from the two aforementioned meetings are listed below:

- The outstanding issues that hindered a full consensus on “A Strategic Framework for the Implementation of AEGIS - Discussion paper” were resolved and an updated policy document version will be published on the ECPGR website.
- The development of a quality system for the management of dispersed accessions of the European Collection was given due attention. The formulation of and agreement on so-called minimum technical standards by the partners concerned was felt to be one of the cornerstones of the quality system. Furthermore, an appropriate system of record-keeping of activities performed, as well as the development of an effective guiding and advisory approach (and not of “policing”) of the AEGIS partners, were identified as key elements of the quality system. The SC requested that the authors of the discussion paper “Quality Management System for AEGIS” revise the draft accordingly.
- The so-called primary selection criteria to identify European Accessions were discussed and approved, and the term “selection requirements” was coined for these criteria, as these are binding in a more formal sense for the countries when accepting responsibilities for the long-term conservation and their availability (see footnote¹). The previously named “secondary selection criteria” that are intended only for guidance of the selection process, especially of possibly unwanted duplicates, were renamed “selection criteria”.
- National Coordinators (NCs) are encouraged to ensure that all relevant non-confidential collection data are included in the National Inventories and transferred to EURISCO as soon as possible, thus facilitating the selection process

of European Accessions.

- The SC noted the importance of establishing a clear road map for the establishment of AEGIS. The final text of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was adopted by consensus, with one single reservation of the Nordic countries on a specific article, which is expected to be reconsidered no later than June 2009. This document will provide the formal foundation for the establishment and operation of AEGIS and will be sent as soon as possible to the respective NCs for signature of membership to AEGIS. Each of the NCs will conclude so-called Associate Membership Agreements with all institutions and organizations in their respective country that plan to participate in AEGIS activities.
- As defined in the MoU, AEGIS members will present lists of identified Most Appropriate Accessions for all plant genetic resources for food and agriculture to the respective ECPGR Working Groups. All the ECPGR Working Groups are expected to actively engage in establishing AEGIS.

Footnote¹

Accessions proposed as European Accessions must meet the general selection requirements adopted by the ECPGR Steering Committee:

- a. Material under the management and control of the member countries and their associate members, in the public domain and offered by the associate members for inclusion into AEGIS;
- b. Genetically unique within AEGIS, to the best available knowledge (i.e. genetically distinct accessions; assessment based on available data and/or on the recorded history of the accession);
- c. Plant genetic resources for food and agriculture as defined in the International Treaty as well as medicinal and ornamental species;
- d. European origin or introduced germplasm that is of actual or potential importance to Europe (for breeding, research, education or for historical and cultural reasons).



Fruit and vegetables on sale at the market in Sarajevo.
Photo: L. Maggioni, Biodiversity International