

Third meeting of the Network Coordinating Group on Sugar, Starch and Fibre Crops



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The Network Coordinating Group (NCG) of the ECPGR Working Groups (WG) on *Beta*, Potato, Fibre Crops (Flax and Hemp) and Medicinal and Aromatic Plants (MAPs, see article on page 3 for further information) met at the Julius Kühn-Institut (JKI), Quedlinburg, Germany on 8-9 October 2009. The meeting started with a brief review of the Network budget and workplans. In 2008 the Network budget for actions in Phase VIII was directed to the *Origanum* project of the MAPs WG instead of funding several small projects for all crops. This project comprises molecular characterization of 1200 genotypes (20 plants x 3 populations x 20 countries) by means of SSR's to analyze the genetic diversity of *Origanum*.

It was noted that methodologies and tools for

the *in situ* management of crop wild relatives applied for *Beta* and other model crops by the AEGRO project (<http://aegro.bafz.de/>) will be of interest to the MAPs Working Group.

The Chair of the Fibre Crops WG, Martin Pavelek (AGRITEC, Czech Republic), informed the NCG that the cultivation of flax and hemp has decreased considerably in Europe during recent years due to imports e.g. from China. Moreover, at the Centro di Ricerca per le Colture Industriali, Bologna, Italy, research on hemp has ceased.

Since 2006 an on-line tool facilitates data input in the European Cultivated Potato Database directly by the collection curators. Fifteen curators received a password from the database manager, Heather Campbell (SASA, United Kingdom), and seven

of them are entering data via this tool regularly. The Wild Potato Database was recently updated and is available as a downloadable system.

Ana Maria Barata (INRB/ INIA, Portugal) informed the NCG on the recent developments in the AEGIS process while Roel Hoekstra (CGN, the Netherlands) elucidated the concept of the Accession Level Information System and its implementation in the Global Information on Germplasm Accessions (GIGA). The NCG then discussed the future role of the European Central Crop Databases (ECCDBs) and concluded that they provide Working Groups with corporate identity and, if sufficiently supported, will continue to play a significant role as a central management instrument within the ECPGR Working Groups. The NCG is convinced that although this Network deals with a very wide range of crops, synergies can be created by a stronger cooperation in the field of data documentation and *in situ* management.

At the end of the meeting Roel Hoekstra was elected as the new Network Coordinator. The participants warmly thanked Lothar Frese (JKI, Quedlinburg) who has chaired the NCG for the past ten years.



Flax field in France, Picardie, close to Saint-Valery-sur-Somme. If the decline in production area continues, such views will become rare in Europe. Photo: Lothar Frese, Julius Kühn-Institut (JKI), Quedlinburg, Germany

AEGIS is now formally established

On 22 April 2009 the AEGIS Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was sent to the ECPGR National Coordinators for signature by the respective country authorities. On 23 July 2009, upon signature of the MoU by the tenth country eligible for membership, AEGIS entered into force. As of 10 December 2009, the following 17 countries are now AEGIS member countries: Albania; Azerbaijan; Bulgaria; Cyprus; Czech Republic; Estonia; Finland; Georgia; Germany; Ireland; the Netherlands; Norway; Portugal; Slovak Republic; Slovenia; Switzerland; and Ukraine.

At the present time, plant genetic resources for food and agriculture (PGRFA) in Europe are conserved in more than 600 institutions scattered over more than 40 European countries. While coordination of activities is carried out within the framework of ECPGR and the ECPGR Crop Working Groups, each genebank basically operates on its own, providing for the conservation of a full range of crop germplasm important for agriculture in the area it serves.

With this in mind, the countries of the European region believe that there is a need to improve coordination and share responsibilities with respect to the conservation of, management of and access to PGRFA in Europe by setting up AEGIS.

The legal mechanism for establishing AEGIS is the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) entered into by eligible countries of the region and the European Commission. To be eligible for AEGIS membership, the countries listed must be members of ECPGR, and either Contracting Parties to the Treaty or otherwise willing to make PGRFA under their jurisdiction available under the conditions of the Treaty.



www.ecpgr.cgiar.org/AEGIS/AEGIS.htm