

Report of a Network Coordinating Group on Industrial Crops and Potato

First meeting - 11 September 1999 - Bury St. Edmunds, United Kingdom

L. Maggioni, *compiler*

European Cooperative Programme for Crop Genetic Resources Networks (ECP/GR)

Draft Report of a Meeting of the Industrial Crops and Potato

Network Coordinating Group,

Butterfly Hotel, Bury St Edmunds, United Kingdom, 11 September 1999

Report prepared by Lorenzo Maggioni, ECP/GR Coordinator

Participants:

Stuart Carnegie, SASA
Lothar Frese, BAZ
Roel Hoekstra, CGN
Lorenzo Maggioni, IPGRI
Maureen Mc Creath, SASA
Martin Pavelek, AGRITEC
Paolo Ranalli, ISCI

Introduction

The ECP/GR Coordinator welcomed the participants and thanked them for their presence at the Network Coordinating Group (NCG) meeting. He then asked them to briefly introduce themselves. Members of the Coordinating Group attending the meeting were Lothar Frese (Chair of the *Beta* Working Group and manager of the International Beta Database), Roel Hoekstra (Proponent and Acting Chair of the Potato Working Group and manager of the European wild potato species Database) and Stuart Carnegie (Manager of the European potato varieties Database). Attending the meeting as observers were Martin Pavelek, manager of the ESCORENA flax database, who was invited in the light of the need to strengthen collaboration between ECP/GR and the FAO ESCORENA network. Also Paolo Ranalli, member of the World *Beta* Network, and Maureen McCreath, assistant to the potato varieties database manager. Bruno Desprez, recently selected as Vice-chair of the *Beta* Working Group and Loek van Soest, who had expressed interest for this meeting, were unable to attend. Branislav Dozet, database manager of the ESCORENA sunflower Database was also unable to attend. The List of participants is attached.

Presentations

L. Maggioni gave information regarding the European Cooperative Programme for Crop Genetic Resources Networks (ECP/GR) explaining the objectives, mode of operation and workplan for Phase VI of the Programme (1999-2003). He specifically outlined the role that the Network Coordinating Groups were

expected to play. Background information on the function of the NCGs had also been distributed to participants in preparation for the meeting.

L. Frese informed the group about the outcome of the first ECP/GR meeting of the Beta Working Group (WG), jointly held with the World *Beta* Network meeting held two days before. He reminded the group that the establishment of this Working group had been recently accepted by the Steering Committee at its last meeting (Braunschweig, July 1998). Recommendations agreed upon by the *Beta* Working Group were explained. Particular emphasis was paid to the development of the International Database for Beta (IDBB), the establishment of the first stage of a mechanism for responsibility sharing, and of a mechanism to improve quality standards within the group. He also clarified that the ECP/GR Working Group on *Beta* will be an important component of the World Beta Network and that the intention will be to continue to hold joint meetings. L. Frese wished to remark upon the usefulness of the presence of the ECP/GR Coordinator in this startup meeting, which had been funded by ECP/GR from the budget allocated to small technical meetings. A draft report of the meeting was distributed to the participants.

Roel Hoekstra informed the meeting about the successful request made to the Steering Committee for the establishment of an ECP/GR Working Group on Potato. The main reason for this request was the concern that the activity initiated within the EU funded project on potato (Gen Res CT95 -34/35) could be continued after its termination in February 2000.

The objectives of the Potato Working Group were summarized as follows:

- Further development of the Central Databases;
- Improvement of health status of potato genetic resources;
- Characterization/evaluation of potential genetic resources for quality traits and resistance to pests and diseases;
- Rationalization of potato collections;
- Diffusion of material and results.

He also gave information about the CGN initiative to collect evaluation data on its genetic resources from the Dutch breeders willing to take part in the initiative to evaluate the material. The results will be collected by CGN and redistributed to the participating breeding companies. After an embargo period these results will be freely available. He explained that for potato the efforts will be undertaken to extend this activity to other countries starting with Germany.

He then informed the meeting about the ongoing discussion within the Potato Working Group, to develop a system whereby responsibility for the maintenance of the accessions on behalf of the group is formally accepted by two institutions. A safety duplication system is also foreseen. R. Hoekstra appreciated the existence of a Working Group on Potato, as an essential forum where these type of agreements can be formalized.

S. Carnegie and R. Hoekstra announced that the two potato databases are expected to become available on the Internet in Autumn 1999.

Martin Pavelek gave information about the structure of the FAO Flax and other BAST Plants Network, which is coordinated centrally by Prof. Ryszard Kozłowski at the Institute of Natural Fibres, Poznan, Poland. The Network includes six Working Groups, and he explained that he was the chair of the WG on Breeding and Plant Genetic Resources. He also clarified that the network focuses mainly on flax, but it also includes hemp, jute, ramie and kenaf. He welcomed any form of cooperation with the ECP/GR Industrial Crops Network and he offered a list of other international networks on industrial crops that can be contacted for cooperation. M. Pavelek gave additional information, explaining that the International Flax Data Base includes 1416 accessions of European and USA origin. Its structure is based on 22 passport descriptors and 24 special descriptors. A project which will be submitted to the EU soon may allow further development of the Database.

M. Pavelek also presented an analysis of the progress made by the Flax network and a number of items requiring priority action were identified as follows:

- Inclusion in the database of missing data from European collections;
- Preparation of the database for Internet presentation (expected to be completed by the end of the year);
- Further progress in the identification of unique material and duplicates;
- Implementation of a mechanism for safety duplication at the network level;
- Adoption of uniform standards for regeneration, conservation and multiplication of the accessions;
- Completion of emergency regeneration;
- Identification of gaps in the collections and potential needs for collecting.

Discussion

New mode of operation of ECP/GR

The NCG agreed that the two Working Groups on *Beta* and on Potato would receive more benefit from specific group meetings than from a full meeting of the Industrial Crops Network. This follows on from the consideration that both crops have little in common and the respective experts would not be interested in the other crop. A startup meeting for a newly established group such as the Potato WG was considered essential, as the Beta meeting had proved to be. There was also consensus on the idea that the most cost effective way to use funds available for the Industrial Crops Network would be to organize Working Group meetings jointly with other crop-specific events. This would also increase the opportunities for increased participation of ECP/GR in other regional or global initiatives.

It was considered very useful that the Working Group chairs meet with the objective of exchanging ideas and comparing their experiences in the orientation of the Working Groups as well as the level of achievement and the methodologies used in their management. However, considering the existing differences between the *Beta* and the Potato groups, it was thought to be of limited value to hold a meeting of the respective Chairs and Vice-Chairs and database managers. Rather, a meeting of all the WG chairs, possibly held jointly with the Documentation Network meeting was considered to be of great use. Indeed, the implications of any decision of the Documentation Network would effect all the WGs and the presence of all the WG Chairs in such a meeting could speed up the adoption of the Documentation and Information Network recommendations within all the ECP/GR WGs.

Recommendation to the attention of the Steering Committee

It is proposed that the remaining funds (approx. US\$ 58000) allocated during Phase VI to meetings organized within the framework of the Industrial Crops and Potato Network be redistributed as follows:

- Potato Working Group meeting, jointly held with final meeting of the EU funded project in February-March 2000 (estimated 10 ECP/GR funded participants, US\$10,000 plus US\$6,000 for publication and distribution of proceedings);

- *Beta Working Group* meeting, jointly held with WBN meeting, in the year 2002 (estimated 10 ECP/GR funded participants, US\$10,000 plus US\$6,000 for publication and distribution of proceedings);
- Meeting(s) of the NCG, to be held upon request of its members (US\$8,000);
- *Ad hoc* actions, to be identified by the NCG, in consultation with the Secretariat (US\$18,000).

It is proposed that part of the funds allocated to the NCG meeting be used to hold a meeting of all the WG chairs, to be held jointly with the Documentation and Information meeting.

Function of the Industrial Crops Network Coordinating Group

It was acknowledged that the NCG would have the important function of closely looking at the situation of the Industrial Crops and Potato genetic resources in Europe. This group should be able to advise the Steering Committee on the opportunity to undertake activities within the network, such as organizing small meetings, proposing funding of *ad hoc* actions and new Working Groups. It was also considered the preferred forum for first level interaction with other regional or global initiatives within the Industrial Crops and Potato. However, there was agreement on the fact that the review of workplans, progress and achievements of the different Working Groups should remain the primary responsibility of the respective Chairs and Vice-Chairs. It was considered appropriate that the membership of the NCG, be composed of experts involved in high level management of several crops.

Recommendation to the attention of the Steering Committee

It is proposed that, until the next Steering Committee meeting, the Coordinating Group of the Industrial Crops and potato network be composed of Lothar Frese (BAZ), Loek van Soest (CGN) and Bruno Desprez. Their role would be to advise the Steering Committee on the opportunity to undertake activities within the network, such as organizing small meetings, funding *ad hoc* actions and proposing new Working Groups. The NCG should establish a permanent channel of communication with the genetic resources working groups of the ESCORENA networks on flax and other Bast crops, sunflower and cotton, with the objective of identifying areas of collaboration. The NCG would work preferentially by correspondence. Provided funds are available, occasional meetings of the NCG may be organized, where one to three members of the

SCORENA networks could be invited with the aim of strengthening collaboration in Europe for the conservation and use of the Industrial crops and potato genetic resources. A report on the NCG activity will be prepared by December 2000 for the attention of the mid-term Steering committee meeting.

Collaboration with the SCORENA Network

It was recognized that ongoing collaboration for flax and other fiber crops within the context of the SCORENA network is useful. The value of flax and hemp for the implementation of sustainable agriculture in Europe was stressed. It was also noted that these crops still need support to fulfill the objectives of conservation of the European genetic resources. For example, it was acknowledged that the database on flax is far from completion, since it includes only a small fraction of the estimated number of accessions conserved in Europe.

It was also pointed out that a revival of the cultivation of hemp for textile and non textile applications is expected. However, genetic resources of hemp are considered at risk. P. Ranalli announced that Istituto Sperimentale per le Colture Industriali, Bologna, is planning to organize an international meeting on the subject. The initiative was welcomed and he was encouraged to get the support of the SCORENA Network.

It was considered important to strive for an intensified collaboration between ECP/GR and the SCORENA networks on flax and fiber crops and on sunflower. Initial steps

for this collaboration were listed as follows:

- Inclusion of the members of the genetic resources working Groups of the SCORENA network on the mailing list of IPGRI, for distribution of information, such as the Newsletter for Europe and the ECP/GR publications;
- Involvement of the database managers of the SCORENA databases in the activities of the ECP/GR Documentation Network;
- Intensified exchange of information on the respective initiatives, such as the organization of meetings or the establishment of databases;
- Participation of SCORENA members in ECP/GR meetings and vice-versa.

Other business

L. Frese also announced that the *in-vitro* potato collection maintained in Braunschweig is at risk, since the initial size of 250 accessions has grown during the years up to 800 accessions, whereas the staff support has remained the same. It was recommended that Germany's commitment to the maintenance of this valuable collection be fulfilled, or else parts of this germplasm might be lost.

It was noted that the definition of the members of the Working Group on potato has not yet been completed by all the member countries. The ECP/GR Coordinator will invite the National coordinators to define the potato representatives possibly before the end of the year.

Bury St Edmunds, 11 September 1999