



ECPGR Workshop “Assessing current practices and procedures to strengthen AEGIS”

Summary

The ECPGR Workshop “Assessing current practices and procedures to strengthen AEGIS”, sponsored by the German Federal Ministry for Food and Agriculture and organized in collaboration with the Instituto Nacional de Investigación y Tecnología Agraria y Alimentaria (INIA), was held at Centro Nacional de Capacitación Agraria (CENCA), San Fernando de Henares, Madrid from 10 to 12 December 2018. The 59 participants, including policy/decision-makers, ECPGR National Coordinators, Associate Member institutes of AEGIS, genebank curators, members of ECPGR Crop Working Groups and a representative from the Crop Trust, were selected based on expressions of interest received from a representative group of countries and institutes, wishing to learn from each others’ experiences with the establishment and operation of AEGIS.

The Workshop was a follow-up to the agreement reached at the Steering Committee meeting in Thessaloniki in 2018, to hold a workshop on AEGIS before the end of 2018. The slow progress of AEGIS had been noted, mainly on the basis of the low number of accessions flagged in EURISCO as part of the European Collection. The agreed objectives of the Workshop were:

1. To provide information at all levels about scope and importance of AEGIS (targeting relevant stakeholders);
2. To offer examples of positive policy engagement;
3. To offer examples of mechanisms to identify accessions to be included in the AEGIS European Collection;
4. To identify reasons why the process is slowed down at different levels and offer solutions; and
5. To facilitate AEGIS activities during Phase X.

The meeting was conducted in a very constructive and positive atmosphere which enabled the achievement of a list of very encouraging Action Points, together with the responsible person/entity and a deadline for the delivery, thus addressing the Workshop objectives.

The main Action Points (full details in annexed table) include the preparation of a letter of intent that would allow France to become AEGIS member during 2019; clarifications and adjustments of the selection and flagging procedures of accessions to be included in the European Collection; implementation of AQUAS elements, including the testing of the proof of concept of a peer review approach; follow-up steps to address the handling of vegetatively propagated crops, including phytosanitary and long-term safety back-up aspects; clarification about the inter-relationship between AEGIS, the International Treaty and the Nagoya Protocol; increasing the visibility of AEGIS activities and accessions; strengthening the capacity of Associate Members to effectively implement AEGIS; approaches to obtain additional funding; and to prepare a letter to the Ministries of Agriculture to highlight the results of the Workshop and to stress the value and importance of AEGIS for European agriculture and food security.

Based on expressed intentions of the participants, the expectation for 2019 is that the membership of AEGIS could be extended at least to France, Serbia and Spain. The European Collection should substantially increase its size, the quality standards are expected to be agreed for most crops and the blueprint of a quality monitoring system should be tested.



Participants in the workshop

Workshop sponsored by the German Federal Ministry for Food and Agriculture



Workshop organized in collaboration with the Instituto Nacional de Investigación y Tecnología Agraria y Alimentaria (INIA)



Workshop 'Assessing current practices and procedures to strengthen AEGIS', 10-12 December 2018, San Fernando de Henares, Madrid, Spain

Action points discussed and agreed at the workshop

Action points	Responsible members or bodies / Timeframe
Improving functioning and understanding of AEGIS	
1. Prepare a flow diagram describing the AEGIS implementation process in a country (signature of MoU by member country and Associate Members and all important actions deriving from this signature)	<i>Secretariat by end of March 2019</i>
2. Increase visibility of AEGIS Associate Members and of AEGIS material within holding institutions (i.e. AEGIS label to enhance status)	<i>National Programmes/Associate Members – ongoing activity</i>
3. Expand the AEGIS webpage for individual countries with more details on Associate Members (i.e. safety duplication information, participation in EVA, offers for services, etc.)	<i>Secretariat in liaison with Associate Members – expanded website by June 2019</i>
4. Provide to AMs a table for estimation of genebank operation costs	<i>Secretariat by end of January 2019</i>
5. Encourage Associate Members to express specific requests and offers for regeneration / safety duplication needs, etc. (via WGs or Secretariat)	<i>Secretariat sends encouragement to National Coordinators – spring 2019</i>
6. Focus/prioritize the use/evaluation of AEGIS material in genebank characterization plans, EVA network or other projects	<i>Associate Members/National Coordinators - ongoing</i>
7. National Programmes should consider translating relevant AEGIS documents into their national language for upload on the ECPGR website.	<i>National Programmes at their discretion - ongoing</i>

Action points	Responsible members or bodies / Timeframe
Selecting and Flagging procedure	
8. It is reconfirmed to use the “Revised simplified procedure” (either by Associate Member/National Coordinator), i.e.	
a. Accessions originating within the country (check old name of the country)	
b. Accessions collected or received from collecting missions outside the country and considered unique (after verification that legal status allows distribution with SMTA).	
c. In case another country X has already flagged accessions that originated in country Y and country Y also holds them and intends to take primary responsibility for their long-term conservation as part of the European Collection, country Y should proceed with flagging these accessions in EURISCO and concomitantly contact the NC of country X to recommend de-flagging by country X.	
d. Option of considering additional criteria such as passport data, characterization data, safety duplication, quality [at the discretion of the country].	<i>National Coordinators of AEGIS member countries ensure process is completed latest by the end of 2019</i>
AQUAS – The AEGIS Quality System	
9. All Associate Members should complete their genebank manuals based on AEGIS template (these are describing the current situation, not necessarily corresponding to the target standards)	<i>Associate Members with help of Secretariat six months after a training workshop</i>
10. Working Groups should complete the crop-specific standards using the AEGIS templates and the documents should be made widely available and visible	<i>Working Group Chairs in consultation with WG members and helped by Secretariat by the end of 2019</i>
11. AQUAS is made of a number of valid elements, but the monitoring step is missing and needs to be implemented:	
a. Peer review proof of concept to be tested (colleague experts visiting, discussing and learning from each other – not an auditing or policing exercise)	<i>Under coordination of CGN, first peer review cycle to be completed in early 2019</i>
b. SC-approved monitoring procedure to be kept on hold for future use	(-)

Action points	Responsible members or bodies / Timeframe
<p>c. To trigger quality improvement of the genebanks, create on the ECPGR website a list of AEGIS genebanks that fulfil quality criteria (to be developed by group of experts), based on a dedicated monitoring exercise</p>	<p><i>Germany to write a one-pager concept in 2019 to be submitted through the Secretariat to the SC for email consultation/approval</i></p>
<p>d. Capacity building to be achieved through e.g. training workshops via grant scheme, information desk, bilateral assistance, training material, FAQs, etc.</p>	<p><i>Secretariat as a hub to receive training requests – ongoing Peer review (CGN) and potential workshop – 2019 Grant Scheme (applications to future calls by stakeholders) and other sources (voluntary contributions) – ongoing</i></p>
<p>Vegetatively propagated crops</p>	
<p>12. Long-term safety back-up is an issue to be tackled. The fruit WGs should define a crop-specific safety duplication strategy, including the use of different conservation approaches, such as the possible contribution of targeted on-farm conservation. An ad hoc group should develop a cryo-conservation concept, raising this idea at the level of the global conservation strategies</p>	<p><i>Malus/Pyrus WG to develop a concept for the establishment of an ad hoc group involving all relevant WGs - to be submitted to the SC for consideration, via Secretariat - 2019</i></p>
<p>13. Phytosanitary issues remain critical for quarantine pests and diseases and may prevent the exchange of AEGIS material. This should not inhibit the process of flagging AEGIS accessions, as long as material is assumed to be free of quarantine pest and diseases. Capacity building could be useful on implementing preventive measures and detecting very early stage symptoms of quarantine pests and diseases during field genebank monitoring.</p>	<p><i>Malus/Pyrus WG, in consultation with Prunus and Vitis WGs, to develop a one-page guideline to advise curators on how to proceed regarding flagging, conservation and distribution of AEGIS accessions subject to risk of infection - 2019</i></p> <p><i>Fruit WGs to organize training workshop on preventive measures for quarantine pests and diseases– Phase X</i></p>
<p>14. The medium-term AEGIS optimization strategy of fruit trees, including selection of accessions at European level (synonymy, “preferred name”, errors...) needs further elaboration by WGs’ crop experts. This will be much easier when accurate large scale harmonized SSR’s data will be available in a DB. Since newly propagated fruit trees need at least three to five years before producing fruits, it is recognized that some redundancy / replicates in field orchards have a high value for direct uses in research, breeding and for increasing public and policy makers awareness.</p>	<p><i>Fruit WGs to develop optimization strategy organizing a workshop – Phase X</i></p>

Action points	Responsible members or bodies / Timeframe
Legal matters	
15. Prepare letter of intent for France joining AEGIS	<i>France in consultation with legal expert to complete draft for approval by the ECPGR SC by end of March 2019. Signature by French Ministry to follow in 2019</i>
16. Countries that have not yet joined the FAO International Treaty, are encouraged to do so in order to avoid complications related to national legislation when flagging accessions in AEGIS	<i>Ongoing</i>
17. AEGIS members that have not yet completed agreements with all the relevant Associate Members in their country, are invited to do so	<i>Secretariat to send reminders to National Coordinators – early 2019</i>
18. Set up a Task Force to clarify issues related to non-food/feed use of AEGIS such as ornamental and medicinal plant accessions	<i>Secretariat ask SC who would be interested to participate in the process – early 2019</i>
Funding AEGIS	
19. Explore options at national level (involvement of private or public sector, delegation of responsibilities for lobbying on AEGIS matters)	<i>National Coordinators, WG members and genebank managers – ongoing</i>
20. Explore options for projects with funding from EU and other international bodies	<i>Everyone - ongoing</i>
21. Within the framework of GenRes Bridge and the preparation of the envisaged EU agrobiodiversity strategy and the potential EU PGR Programme, we will have the opportunity to include AEGIS as the <i>ex situ</i> pillar and then seek funding or co-funding when the value of our system will be acknowledged by the EC	<i>PGR partners in GenRes Bridge project – within project timeframe (2019-2021)</i>
22. Write a letter to the ministries under advice from NCs, pointing out the results of this meeting and the value of AEGIS and its AMs as a tool contributing to agriculture and food security	<i>Secretariat to draft and circulate to workshop participants and then to SC for approval by spring 2019</i>