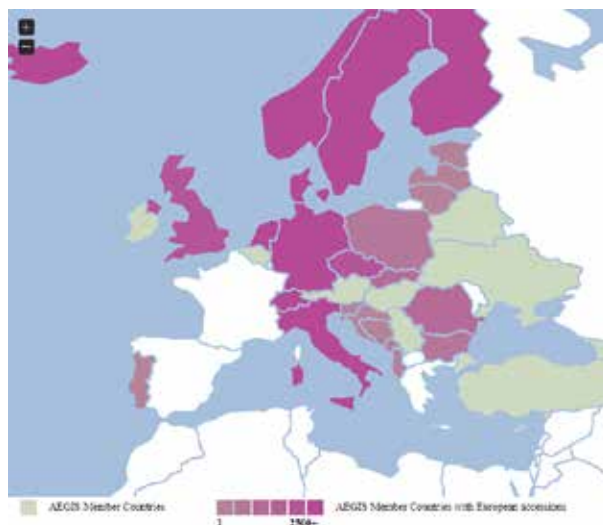


The European Collection

As of November 2021, the European Collection is composed of nearly 60,000 unique accessions provided by 24 countries.



AQUAS: Quality Management System for AEGIS

The AEGIS Quality Management System is the set of policies, processes and procedures that are to be followed by all members of AEGIS to assure an appropriate quality of the activities.

Elements of AQUAS:

- General and crop-specific standards
- Operational genebank manuals
- Safety duplication policy
- Distribution guidelines
- Record keeping, reporting and monitoring.

Benefits of AEGIS

- ▶ Commitment for long-term conservation of genetic resources
- ▶ Well defined terms of access to genetic material (Standard Material Transfer Agreement)
- ▶ *De facto* extension of the Multilateral System to non-Annex I genetic material
- ▶ Agreed high-quality standards for conservation across the European region
- ▶ Reduced risk of loss of material through systematic safety duplication
- ▶ Opportunity to prioritize public funds for characterization and evaluation of public domain European Accessions
- ▶ Rationalization of the European genebank conservation system (opportunities for cost saving)



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A European Genebank Integrated System

What is AEGIS?

AEGIS is a platform connecting European genebanks under a common system for the long-term conservation of unique accessions of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (PGRFA). These selected accessions are maintained by the participating institutions (i.e. Associate Member institutions) at an agreed quality standard and are made available in accordance with the terms and conditions set out in the International Treaty on PGRFA, i.e. through a Standard Material Transfer Agreement.



www.ecpgr.cgiar.org/aegis

AEGIS Membership

AEGIS entered into force in 2009 with the signature of the Memorandum of Understanding by ten ECPGR member countries. By November 2021, 35 member countries and 68 Associate Member institutions had joined AEGIS.

Membership is open to all European countries that are members of ECPGR and willing to make PGRFA available under the conditions of the International Treaty.



Governance and structure

AEGIS operates within the framework of ECPGR. The ECPGR Steering Committee has overall responsibility and oversight over the operation of AEGIS and delegated the oversight function to its Executive Committee. Coordination of AEGIS is provided by the ECPGR Secretariat. The ECPGR Crop Working Groups provide technical support. Associate Member institutions conserve the genetic material and/or offer related services, such as regeneration capacity, safety-duplication space, etc.

Steps for the implementation of AEGIS

- ▶ Member country signs a Memorandum of Understanding at ministerial level with the legal host of ECPGR, currently the Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT
- ▶ Member country's National Coordinator signs Associate Memberships Agreements with national institutions conserving genetic resources or providing related services
- ▶ National Coordinators, in agreement with Associate Member institutions, designates accessions under their jurisdiction that they wish to include in the European Collection
- ▶ Designated accessions become European Accessions as soon as they are flagged in EURISCO by the National Inventory Focal Point as "part of AEGIS"
- ▶ European Accessions are expected to be conserved by their holding Associate Member institutions for the long term and according to agreed quality standards. They should also be safety-duplicated in a different institution and provided to users upon request under the terms of the Standard Material Transfer Agreement of the International Treaty
- ▶ ECPGR Crop Working Groups define the standards, identify gaps and avoid inclusion of redundancies in the European Collection.



Hordeum vulgare L. – winter barley cultivar 'Fabian', accession N. 01C0502112, conserved in Kroměříž, Czech Republic. Photo by Z. Nesvadba / CRI - Prague, Czech Republic

Beneficiaries

- ▶ All users (breeders, researchers, trainers, farmers) have access under common terms to plant genetic material that is:
 - Well defined across the European region
 - Increasingly well characterized and evaluated
 - AEGIS-quality certified.
- ▶ Genebank curators join a community where conservation standards are jointly discussed, revised and agreed. Possibility to request capacity-building support is facilitated.
- ▶ European policymakers can prioritize the development of a truly regional initiative enhancing the efficiency of the European infrastructure and contributing to the general public good.



Lactuca sativa L. – cutting lettuce 'Ibis', accession CGN14606, characterization trial in 2008. Photo by R. van Treuren – Centre for Genetic Resources, the Netherlands.

Challenges

AEGIS is an ongoing initiative. Its development and full operation currently depends on the efforts contributed by the individual member countries and by the lean coordination that is being provided by the ECPGR Secretariat. AEGIS is looking for a more adequate sponsorship to boost its potential and would welcome to be formally supported by the European Union or other agencies.