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Organic seed databases for increasing the transparency and use of organic seed in Europe

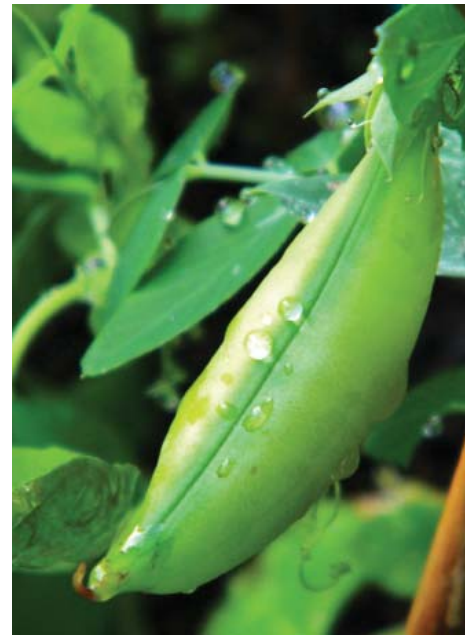
The use of organic seed and vegetative propagation material is one of the fundamental principles in organic farming. It became mandatory within the European Union (EU)'s organic agriculture regulation EEC 2092/91 in 2004 and is nowadays regulated by the EC 834/2007 and 889/2008. According to the regulations, the

use of chemically treated seeds is prohibited, yet untreated and conventionally produced seeds may be used if derogation is granted by the national competent authorities (Art. 45, EC 889/2008). The implementation of a computerised database is furthermore mandatory for all EU Member States in order to list the availability of organic seed. Such databases will gain even more importance with the upcoming revision of the organic regulation, which aims to ensure the availability of 100% organic seeds and end all derogation within in the next 15 years.

However, a sufficient supply of organically produced seed is not yet ensured within the EU due to various reasons such as the low investments in organic seed production in the past. Interactive organic seed databases, such as organicXseeds (www.organicxseeds.com), are an important tool to facilitate the use and distribution of organic seed by making the organic seed market more transparent and by connecting demand and supply.

Organic seed categories

Currently, three different types of plant material are used for organic agriculture:



- 1) Conventionally bred and propagated plant material, but without post-harvest seed treatment = 'untreated conventional seed';
- 2) Conventionally bred plant material, propagated under organic conditions = 'organic seed' and
- 3) Organically bred cultivars, tested and propagated under organic conditions = 'organic seed of organic cultivars'

However, only the second and third types are considered organic plant material. Conventionally bred and propagated plant material can only be used for organic farming when derogation is granted and without post-harvest treatment. Considering possible future developments and keeping in mind the new EU organic regulation that might further restrict derogations, the

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NOSB BOARD SPRING MEETING

The spring 2018 meeting of the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB), will take place in Arizona from 25-27 April. All meeting documents, including the meeting agenda, NOSB proposals and discussion documents, instructions for submitting and viewing public comments, and instructions for requesting time for oral comments, will be available on the AMS website at www.ams.usda.gov/NOSBMeetings. ■

More information at: www.ams.usda.gov

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RELEVANT EU ORGANIC ITEMS PUBLISHED IN 2017

The following EU organic items published in the EU Official Journal could be of interest to TOS's readers:

Regulation (EU) 2017/2273 postponing the end of the exceptional production rules of articles 42(b) and 43 of Regulation (EC) No 889/2008 until the end of 2018. The exceptional production rules refer to the use of non-organically reared pullets for egg production and of non-organic protein feed for porcine and poultry species.

Council Decision (EU) 2017/2307 on the 'Organic' Trade Agreement between the EU and Chile. It entered into force on 1 January 2018.

Regulation (EU) 2017/2329 amending and correcting Annexes III, IV and V of Regulation (EC) No 1235/2008 on organic imports.

Regulation (EU) 2017/2470 publishing a list of authorised and notified novel foods. ■

More information at <http://www.ifoam-eu.org/en/organic-regulations/list-eu-organic-regulations>

Plant material for organic agriculture (OA)

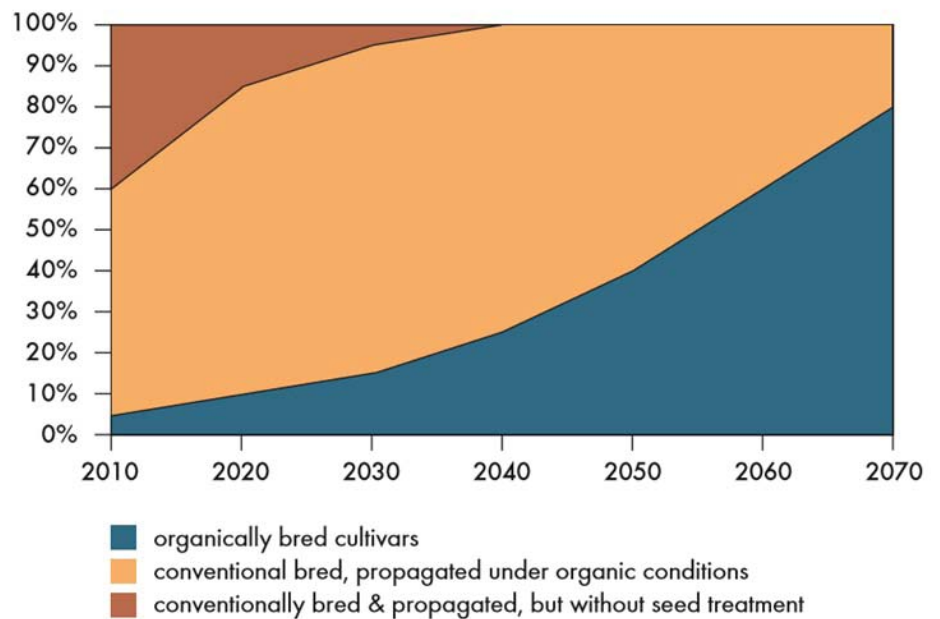


Figure 1. Schematic time line to reach the goal of 100 % organically propagated seed from suitable cultivars (adapted from Messmer 2013).

organic sector should target 100% organic seed use in the near future (Figure 1).

Nonetheless, derogations for untreated conventionally propagated seed are necessary for bridging the gap between demand and supply of organic seed. But these derogations also impede the development of the organic seed market.

In accordance with the organic seed regulation, some EU Member States applied a system for categorising organic seed into two or three different categories depending on the availability of seed and defining in which cases derogation can be granted (Table 1). Crops for which a wide range of organic seed cultivars are available in sufficient

quantity on a national level can be placed into Category I and derogation will not be granted for commercial organic production. Several Member States are already working with a Category I and the numbers of countries developing the Category is generally increasing. Even though a European-wide Category I is provided within Annex X of the EC 889/2008, it still does not include any entries.

Under Category II, farmers need to apply for individual derogation, whereas under Category III, the amount of organic seed is so small, that the national competent authorities grant general derogation to all farmers. The overall aim for the Member States should be to move crops from Category III to Category

...the organic sector should target 100% organic seed use in the near future. ■

II and from Category II to Category I in order to increase the use of organic seed and phase out derogations.

Organic seed database

The purpose of an organic seed database is to list the varieties for which organically produced seeds or vegetative plant materials are available.

The general requirements of the seed database are defined in Title II/Chapter 7 of the EC 889/2008 regulation. According to the regulation, farmers are obliged to use organic seed if it is entered in the database and therefore the database provides the legal basis for granting derogation in case of the absence of organic seed.

Table 1: National Annex categorising plant material depending on availability

Natioanal Annex	Availability of seed	Derogation
Category I	● ● ●	No derogation
Category II	● ○	Individual derogation
Category III	○	General derogation

Currently, 16 Member States have implemented an online database, which offers the possibility to search for available organic seed. Ten countries list the available organic seed in a document which can be downloaded by the user. For two Member States no information could be found.

The most commonly used organic seed database is organicXseeds, developed by FiBL. This interactive database has already been implemented in six EU Member States (Denmark, Belgium, Luxembourg, the UK, Republic of Ireland, Sweden) and Switzerland, and is used by farmers, seed suppliers, control bodies and authorities to bolster the organic seed market and to

meet all the legal requirements of the EU regulation. (Figure 2).

OrganicXseeds can be translated into every national language and customised to the individual requirements of each country.

The database is easily accessible and without any cost for farmers through a user-friendly website (www.organicxseeds.com) where the desired information on the availability of organic seed can be found with just a few clicks.

Seed suppliers can upload their available seed stock via their own account and it will be immediately shown in the database.

Thanks to regular reminders, offers are kept up to date and the database therefore provides real-time

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NATURAL & ORGANIC PRODUCTS EUROPE

The trade show for organic and natural products will take place at London ExCeL from 22- 23 April this year. The show is renowned for showcasing the best choice of certified organic, GMO-free, vegan, vegetarian, and sustainable health and wellness innovations from around the world - from natural healthcare products, natural and organic foods, through to natural personal care and eco-household products. ■

More information at: www.naturalproducts.co.uk

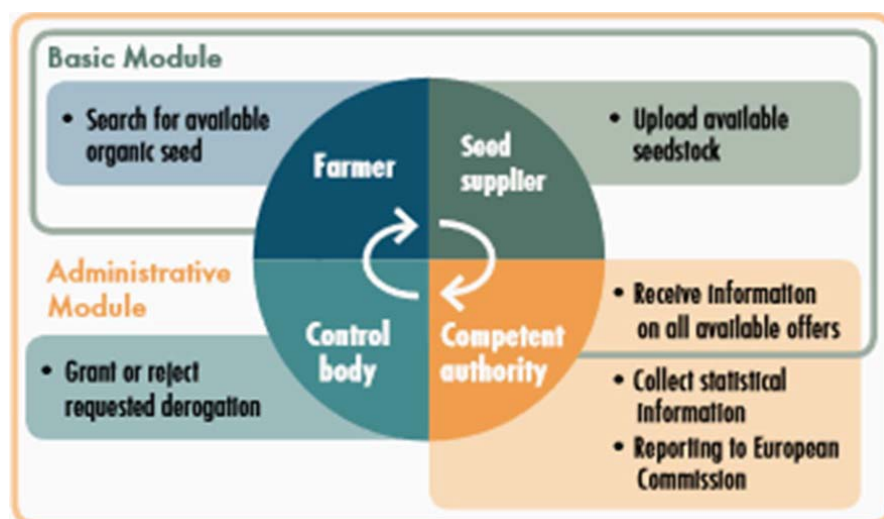


Figure 2: organicXseeds overview: basic and administrative module

information about the available seed stock. The data only has to be entered once into the system and the offer can be published in all countries that use organicXseeds.

Farmers can search for the available seed stock and the contact details of the seed suppliers, without having to register themselves in the system. However, after registering for free, the farmer can request a derogation directly via the database as well as an overview of all requested derogations and their current status. The farmer's personal data is protected and is not visible within the database. The national competent authority in charge of derogation requests automatically receives the farmer's derogation request and can

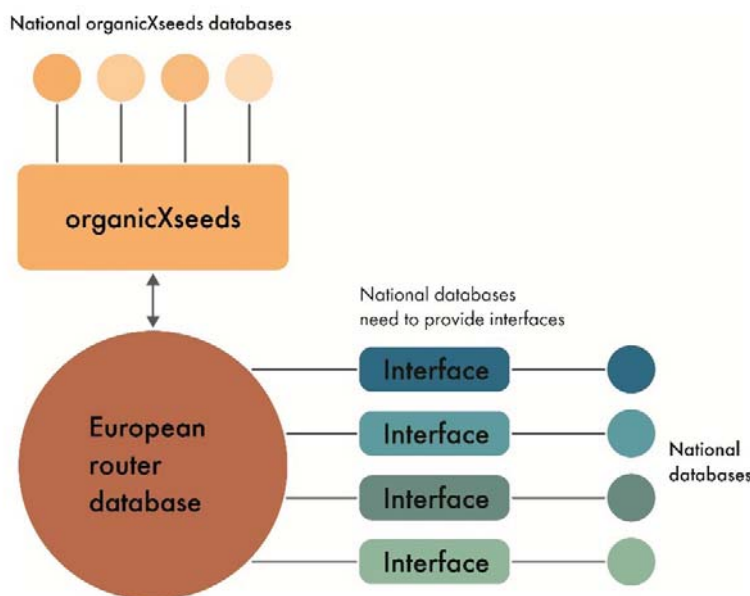


Figure 3: National European router database and organicXseeds

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CALL FOR EXPERTS ON THE JAPANESE ORGANICS MARKET

In the framework of its 'Food & Drinks' mission (5-9 March 2018) in Japan, the EU-Japan Centre for Industrial Cooperation is looking for an expert with detailed knowledge of Japan's organics market. The expert should have expertise in at least one of the following fields: organic food (raw ingredients and processed food/drinks) in Japan, food packaging in Japan and knowledge of the potential business opportunities that the EU-Japan EPA will create for EU agri-food companies. ■
Contact: email: d.lula@eu-japan.eu

therefore increase their efficiency by having all necessary information in one place.

In case nationwide internet access is not provided (eg, in mountain regions), it is also possible for the national competent authority to request a derogation within the database on behalf of the farmer. Furthermore, all of the relevant statistical information on granted derogations can be used for reporting to the European Commission.

The organic seed database will be developed into a router database, within the scope of the EU-project LIVESEED, in the next four years. The goal of a router database is to link the different national databases and therefore increase the transparency of the organic seed market in Europe. It will reduce barriers for organic seed suppliers (eg, for marketing organic

seeds to a neighbouring country) and provides one single technical solution rather than having several workarounds.

A router database will also harmonise the implementation of the EU regulation across Europe. In order to link a national database to the router database, an interface is required to translate the information for the different software. In the case of organicXseeds, only one interface is required and countries using this database will automatically be linked to the router database as shown in Figure 3.

Conclusions

Organic seed databases are an important tool to connect those involved in the organic seed market by providing easy and low-level access to available organic seed. As

A router database will also harmonise the implementation of the EU regulation across Europe. ■



technical solutions differ between the Member States, and often lack timely updates and easy access, an interactive tool provides a sound solution and should be the standard for supporting transparency in the organic seed market across Europe and help phase out derogations for untreated conventionally propagated seed.

Acknowledgements

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The opinions expressed and arguments employed herein do not necessarily reflect the official views of the EC and the Swiss government.

Neither the European Commission/SERI nor any person acting on behalf of the Commission/SERI is responsible for the use which might be made of the information provided on this website. ■

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