



Cooperatives a model to improve organic seed production

Problems

In several regions of Europe, mainly in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), knowledge and facilities for high-quality organic seed production are less developed. Improvement at various levels is needed: knowledge and equipment at the farm, seed cleaning and storage facilities, marketing of seeds, and logistics of seed transport, good contact with seed certification authorities is important for successful seed production. A key question is how to fund all these activities, when no revenues are yet obtained from seed sales? Together these issues make it difficult to start organic seed production from scratch.

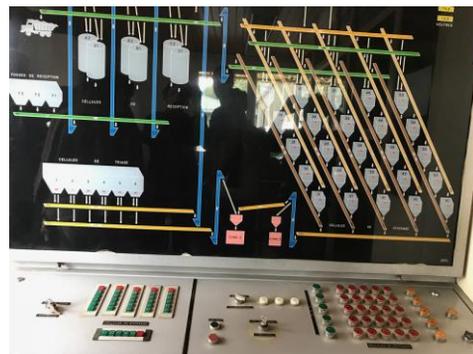


Figure: Scheme of seed cleaning of UBIOS cooperative in France

Solutions

Cooperatives can contribute to tackle some of these problems:

- Sharing knowledge among farmers – better cooperation
- Organising practical training – jointly hiring advisers
- Involving farmers hesitant to start organic production – joining a community
- Increasing market power - providing safety, insurance
- Building critical capacity and knowledge on seed quality and testing - develop new solutions
- Communicating with authorities and lobbying for improved seed regulations

Practical recommendations

Building cooperatives sounds easier than it is. Some general recommendations are:

- Build trust – an on-going process
- Define clear goals – common aims, clear rules
- Have a clear timeline – go step by step
- Communicate clearly – among members, with customers – to maintain trust
- Have the same starting point: 100% organic seed as basic requirement for all members – same values, same attitude
- Gain legal advice for establishing a cooperative in your country

Further information

1. Organic Seed Production Tutorials <https://seedalliance.org/publications/7281/>
2. Organic seed cooperatives: in France <http://unionbiosemences.fr/>
3. In the UK <https://www.seedcooperative.org.uk/>

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LIVESEED: Boosting organic seed and plant breeding across Europe. LIVESEED is based on the concept that cultivars adapted to organic systems are key for realising the full potential of organic agriculture in Europe. Research project 2017-2021.

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