

**3rd European Seminar**  
**Liberating diversity**  
**For the preservation of the bio-diversity of cultivated plants,**  
**our common heritage**  
**19-20 May 2007, Halle, Germany**

In Europe 80% of cultivated plant varieties disappeared over the last century. It is, however, only in the past few years that initiatives have been launched in various countries to try and counter this development. The awareness of the importance of biodiversity has grown throughout the world, and a struggle has developed between two totally different interest groups. On the one hand, farmers on all continents are fighting for their right to produce and re-sow their seeds, while on the other hand the seed multinationals are determined to gain control over the diversity of plants and thereby obtain a monopoly in the seed market.

The aim of the 3rd European Seminar is to strengthen international cooperation and action to ensure that the diversity of cultivated plants remains a commonly owned heritage. The first two such gatherings were organised in Poitiers (France) in 2005<sup>1</sup> and in Bullas (Spain) in 2006<sup>2</sup>. They brought together organisations from southern and western Europe and encouraged exchange and coordination.

Three organisations have decided to prepare the third seminar :

- The BUKO-Campaign against Biopiracy (*BUKO-Kampagne gegen Biopiraterie*)
- The Association for Seed Production free of genetic modification (*Interessengemeinschaft für gentechnikfreie Saatgutarbeit*)
- The European Civic Forum

It is hoped that this seminar will help extend the network created by the first two meetings to northern and eastern Europe. Once again it will above all bring together producers of seeds and organisations involved in campaigning for the right of farmers to keep and re-sow their own seeds.

We decided to organise it in Germany in reaction to the fact that the German seed bank for cultivated plants, the Institute for Plant Genetics and Research into Cultivated Plants (IPK) in Gatersleben, had last year sown genetically modified wheat. This has a direct influence on all initiatives seeking to preserve traditional seeds and it requires a strong coordinated response.

As national institutes, such seed banks have been entrusted with the task of preserving plant diversity and making it publicly accessible. The IPK in Gatersleben has one of the biggest seed collections in Europe and was up until now an important partner for all those who keep and use local varieties. A few years ago the IPK began to collaborate with big seed and biotechnology companies, including the chemical firm BASF.

Experimenting with genetically modified plants in the immediate vicinity of the seed bank creates the risk that traditional varieties will be contaminated. This means that the bank is no longer fulfilling its mission of conservation and is instead opening the way for the privatisation by seed companies of the stored genetic resources.

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<sup>1</sup> Organised by « Réseau Semences Paysannes » (French network for peasant seeds) and the « Coopération Nationale pour la Défense des Semences Fermières » (National Coordination for the Defence of Farm-Saved Seeds)

<sup>2</sup> Organised by « Red de Semillas Resembrando e Intercambiando » (Network for resowing and exchanging seeds) and « Red de Agroecología y Ecodesarrollo de la Región de Murcia » (Network for Agro-Ecology and Eco-Development in the region of Murcia)

It is above all the experiments with wheat that have provoked widespread protests. Today's wheat is the result of ten thousand years of selection and this cereal plays a special role in our culture as a basic foodstuff.

We plan to concentrate on three main questions during the seminar :

1. The situation in different countries with regard to the preservation of seeds in seed banks – public access, present practice and ensuring the absence of genetic modification. Is there a need to launch initiatives to take on the tasks of seed banks?
2. The situation in different countries concerning the right to preserve and re-sow seeds, to have access to plant varieties for cultivation in gardens and on the farm. The obstacles created by legal barriers and recent condemnations of seed producers in France.
3. The special importance of wheat and the present risk to the diversity of its genetic basis.

We intend to invite experts from Russia and Iraq, because the plant varieties of these countries are at present being plundered in a spectacularly brazen way. This will have consequences for all of us.

Two days are all too short for a meeting with such a vast subject matter. We therefore call on participants to prepare a written contribution on the situation in their country with regard to the three questions mentioned above. We propose to send these reports to participants in advance, in order to ensure that we have enough time for the exchange of experiences. We also advise you to arrive on the 18<sup>th</sup>.

We intend to open up the afternoon session on the second day to a wider public. For this afternoon we also plan to organise a seed market, a bread tasting corner, exhibitions and some lectures on key topics.

On 21 May a demonstration will take place in front of the IPK seed bank at Gatersleben. Many organisations will be mobilising for this protest. For more information on this rally please contact us.

The seminar and demonstration will be taking place just before the G8 summit which will start on 2 June. A large number of organisations have decided to give a big priority to the questions of agriculture and food security in the run-up to the summit in an attempt to encourage greater public awareness and debate, as well as to protest against present policies in this field.

We plan to fix the final programme of the seminar by the end of March. Please let us know as soon as possible if you are interested in participating, so that we can organise the lodgings and logistics. Let us know if there are particular topics that you think should be included in the discussions. At the moment we are not sure how much financial support we can count on. Please let us know if your participation in the seminar is only possible if your costs are covered.

Please reply to the following contact address:

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