

# Revision of the European Seed Law

## The Needs of the Organic Breeding Sector

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# IFOAM EU GROUP

- The EU Group of the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements is the European umbrella organisation for organic food and farming
- Fights for the adoption of ecologically, socially and economically sound agriculture systems based on the principles of organic agriculture – health, ecology, fairness and care
- More than 160 member organisations
- Work spans the entire organic food chain and beyond: from farmers and processors, retailers, certifiers, consultants, traders and researchers to environmental and consumer advocacy bodies

# Varieties for Organic Farming?

## What makes the difference:

- Organic Agriculture (OA) is an alternative to conventional and industrial agriculture, legally defined by Regulation (EC) No 834/2007.
- OA forbids the use of GMOs and pesticides. It is based on a systemic approach, considers the interaction between the plants and their environments, and is a driver for agronomic innovation.
- In consequence OA needs plant varieties adapted to *low input, as well as different climatic and geographic conditions*, which are more *resistant to diseases* and which bear excellent qualities in terms of *taste and nutritional value*.

*Organic Breeding is working on these aims.*

# Organic Breeding

develops plant varieties *within the Organic Farming System*.



## Consequently...

- All methods and techniques used have to be in line with the *principles of Organic Agriculture*
- *Diversity* is at the heart of organic breeding: diversity of varieties, and genetic diversity within a given bred or population. Experiments with mixtures and composite crosses are desirable.
- Plants used must be *fertile* and *reproducible* (no sterile hybrids, no inbred lines).



# Key messages

## The European seed law - Current system

The current system of the European Seed Legislation causes trouble to Organic Breeders and seed suppliers in Europe:

- **Uniformity** requirements are not adapted to open pollinating / organic varieties
- Number of traits in technical **DUS protocols** increased over last years, now many traits are tested that are not important for organic breeders and farmers
- Loss of **official testing sites** leads to the problem that special climatic and geographic conditions are not considered.



# Key messages

## The European seed law – Change needed

The current legal situation urgently needs a substantial change

- which recognises the *diversity* of different users and providers of seeds and plant propagating material,
- which creates rules *adapted* to the needs of each different sector, also Organic Agriculture and Organic Breeding
- Which considers *biodiversity* as a key value: Maintenance and further development of plant genetic diversity is key to secure food security of future generations.
- Which respects the *exchange and informal sale* of seeds between farmers, gardeners and users as an (agri-) cultural asset



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## Proposal of the Commission May 2013

The proposal fails to provide better regulation:

- No guarantees for suitable, adapted DUS- and VCU testing criteria for Organic Breeding & Open pollinated populations
- Loss of many public testing facilities due to potential privatisation of testing
- Easier access with simplified registration **presently available for amateur varieties** would be closed for new bred varieties (ORD). “Heterogenous Material” is no sufficient solution.
- More bureaucracy as a burden for small scale, semi-professional operators

**Thus: Substantial improvements are necessary to foster organic breeding!**

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## Demands of Organic Breeding

- Fair market access for new population varieties by adapting examination criteria for registration (DUS).
- Adapted examination criteria for varieties derived from Organic Breeding regards to value of cultivation and use (VCU).
- Adapted examination criteria regards to climatic and cultivation conditions: tests under organic conditions.
- Simplified regulation for varieties for commercial niche markets, also open for new breeds (ORD).
- Transparency on the breeding techniques used and intellectual property rights of varieties.
- No major legislative decisions left to delegated acts.





# Example uniformity

Criteria and number of tested traits have become adapted to hybrids and are not suitable for open pollinated varieties.

Hybrid variety



„Dunja F1“

Organic variety



„Serafina“

*possible solution:  
e.g. pepo – technical protocol  
/ in 2014 adapted from  
absolute to relative uniformity*



registered  
in 2015

## Example distinctiveness:

- Modern hybrid varieties are very similar (narrow genetic basis), to ensure distinctiveness, they must be tested for a huge number of traits
- Many of these traits and characteristics are not important for farmers and consumers at all

## ***Problem for Organic Breeding:***

the more traits have to be pressed into demanded uniformity, the higher the risk to fail in DUS examination

## ***possible solutions:***

- ***Adapted criteria for registration without variety plant protection***
- ***variety- description with use of frequencies in traits – expression (as still standard in forage crops)***



## Example stability:

### ***Problem for Organic Breeding:***

- Regulation is standardized on and thus favoring uniform F1 hybrids
- Natural ability of population varieties to develop leads to better adaptation but small changes over generations. But this is not accepted.
- Adaptation of varieties to special and changing diverse conditions are part of concept for sustainability of Organic Farming.

### ***possible solutions:***

- ***registration without variety plant protection***
- ***Acceptance of nuances of changes in the expression of a variety after several times.***
- ***New adjusting of variety description every 10 years.***

