

Technical workshop: Tuesday 12 April 2016: Seed availability and quality,

Moderator: Martin Koller, Reporter: Joelle Herforth-Rahme

Maarten Vrensen (Vitalis Organic Seeds, NL)

Issues discussed: Limited locations (only organic farms), harsher consequences of weather and pathogens, smaller niches (too small to start a production) make organic seed growing more difficult than conventional. Furthermore additional EU certification for seed produced abroad and import paperwork increase lead time. Processors pressure growers for the use non-organic seeds to reduce production costs of certain crops. For many organic producers decision is led by economy rather than idealism. There is a lack of strong regulation to use organic seeds in organic production. Regulation systems between the countries differ.

Knowledge gaps: There are no methods to completely control seed diseases.

Further actions needed: Regulations should be stricter allowing less derogation concerning the use of organic seeds for organic production.

Answer at times of emergency should be quick so that there is an alternative for the farmers in the face of adversity (weather, disease strike) to get a derogation and for example step down from a category 1 to a category 2 production (e.g. in Belgium it takes 2 weeks whereas in the Netherlands it takes 2 days).

Davide Spadaro (UNITO, IT)

Issues discussed: Prevention remains the best way to obtain healthy seeds. Several physical seed treatments methods and methods using natural products were presented. Hot water treatment and aerated steam are at the moment the best method. For plasma technology and low electron beam, it is not clear whether they would be acceptable for organic agriculture. The use of copper is in some cases a good seed treatment. However many countries are trying to reduce/remove its use. The formulation and commercialization of active natural product is a bottleneck to their use. There are two antagonistic views concerning the labelling of seeds with the treatment use: growers want it stated as an additional guarantee of quality, while seed producers think that a label gives a negative impression (i.e. it is a difficult crop or that there was a problem and they had to treat).

Knowledge gaps: There are several techniques for seed diagnostic but these need to be developed for the practical use. Essential oil use as a seed treatment is at a very early stage and there are no commercial formulation targeted for this use. Evaluation of efficacy but also of the phytotoxicity of each agent should be done. The optimal seed treatment method is crop-dependent.

Further actions needed: The registration and patenting process of biological agent should be made easier.