

# Report of a preparatory meeting for a Network Coordinating Group on Vegetables

Preparatory meeting - 7 May 1999 - Rome, Italy

D. Astley, L. Maggioni and G. Thomas, *compilers*

## **Preparatory Meeting for the Vegetables Network Coordinating Group**

**Rome, Italy, 7 May 1999**

### **Introduction**

During its seventh meeting (Braunschweig, June/July 1998), the ECP/GR Steering Committee made the following recommendation:

*"To achieve greater coordination within the Crop Networks during Phase VI, Network Coordinating Groups will be activated to establish priorities for action for the extended range of crops covered by the Network. These self-organizing coordinating groups will be composed of Working Group Chairs and Vice-Chairs or Database managers. The Network Coordinating Groups will work closely with the Secretariat, to which they will submit proposals for activities and review progress, achievements and future workplans. In the case of crops for which no Working Group yet exists, or in the case of Networks in which no activities have been carried out in the past, the Network Coordinating Groups can initiate ad hoc actions and may propose the establishment of a Working Group to the Steering Committee."*

In February 1999, the ECP/GR Coordinator suggested that Grégoire Thomas could act as "facilitator" for the establishment of the Vegetables Network Coordinating Group (NCG). Grégoire Thomas then proposed that a small preparatory meeting of the Network chairpersons could be organized in Rome. This meeting was held on 7 May 1999 at the IPGRI Regional Office for Europe and it was attended by L. Maggioni (ECP/GR Coordinator), D. Astley (Chair of the *Allium* and Umbellifer crops Working Groups) and G. Thomas (Chair of the *Brassica* Working Group).

Lorenzo Maggioni introduced the meeting by giving the background to the Steering Committee's decision to change the mode of operation of ECP/GR for Phase VI. He explained that there was general consensus on the need to more effectively address the broad range of areas covered by the Global Plan of Action on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture. However, in view of the unlikely prospect of a significant increase of member countries' contributions, the choice was made to emphasize the coordination at the Network level, by entrusting a small number of Network members with this responsibility. On the other hand, the number of regular Working Group (WG) meetings would be reduced. In the case of the Vegetables Network, the budget for Phase VI foresees one meeting of the NCG (about 10 people), planned for the year 2000 and one whole Vegetables Network meeting of about 25 people, representing the different WGs (to be held between 2001 and 2003). The possibility also exists to organize one or two small focused technical meetings of 5-10 people during Phase VI.

## **Discussion**

Dave Astley and G. Thomas expressed the following points of concern, regarding the new mode of operation of ECP/GR during Phase VI:

- The increased responsibility of the components of the NCGs correspond to an increased level of input in kind offered to the Programme by the respective members' governments. However, no clear mechanism exists whereby this engagement can be acknowledged by the NCG members' employer agencies and institutions.
- The reduced possibility to hold regular WG meetings will make it difficult to develop a shared intention among the WG members and to take advantage of the favourable momentum for action which is generated by the WG meetings. Additionally, the role of the WG members, as representatives of all their country stakeholders, may be weakened further if they don't take part in any meeting at the European level.
- The significance of a whole Vegetables Network meeting was questioned, considering that genetic resources issues need to be addressed in very different ways for the different vegetables. A whole Network meeting will likely need to be split into crop sub-groups of a small number of experts, thereby losing the wider regional representation for each crop.

The members of the meeting agreed that the points above mentioned will be conveyed to the Steering Committee for consideration during the next mid-term meeting (Spring 2001). In the meantime, the best effort will be made to establish the NCG and to maintain a high level of activity within the Network.

The need was emphasized for national programmes to affirm their representation on ECP/GR WGs in terms of the attending and corresponding members.

### **Scope of the Vegetables Network**

There was general agreement that the Vegetables Network broaden its focus to the genetic resources of all the economically important vegetables in Europe. A survey on the economic importance of vegetables in the European Union countries conducted by Clive Rahn and partners (<http://www.hri.ac.uk/enveg/data/raw>) was quoted as a possible basis for decision-making. Less economically important vegetables could be included in the scope of the ECP/GR Minor Crops Network.

It is proposed that the Vegetables Network immediately consider three additional broad crop groups, such as Solanaceae (eggplant, tomato and pepper), Cucurbits and Leafy vegetables. Regarding the vegetable beans and potatoes, the Grain Legumes and the Potato Working Groups are expected to include these crops within their workplans. The *Brassica* WG is mainly focussing on vegetable brassicas, while issues related to oilseed brassicas could be given attention by the Industrial Crops Network. Accordingly, country representatives in the *Brassica* WG are expected to come from the vegetables sector. Close interaction is welcome between the Vegetables Network and all the other Networks, especially in case of overlaps of interest.

### **Composition of the Vegetables Network Coordinating Group (NCG)**

It was proposed that the members of the Vegetables NCG take the role of focal persons for the different crops considered by the Network. In preparation for the first NCG meeting, where there are existing WGs (*Allium*, *Brassica* and Umbellifer crops), focal persons would be asked to review the group progress and future perspectives, as well as to develop ideas on possible collaborative activities. In the case of Solanaceae, Cucurbits and Leafy vegetables, the NCG would initially review the status of these crops' genetic resources in Europe, as well as the extent of existing expertise and of potential areas of collaboration for conservation and use at a regional level.

General Network issues suggested for consideration at the NCG meeting include the following:

- Identifying the full range of crops which should be covered by the Network and establishing priorities for action (i.e. developing new Central databases, proposing collecting missions, proposing the constitution of new WGs, etc.)
- Monitoring the conservation mechanisms (regeneration standards, rationalization of collections, safety duplication, sharing of responsibilities) and suggesting lines for action
- Identifying emergency situations and looking for possibilities of intervention
- Coordinating future development of the databases
- Monitoring the needs for characterization/evaluation and the interaction with users, suggesting lines for action

- Looking at the possibility of integrating non-ECP/GR countries into the Network activities
- Establishing links with other Networks

The following names were proposed for the Vegetables NCG. Individuals will be independently contacted to check for their availability:

Vegetables Network Coordinating Group:

<b>Crop Group</b>	<b>Focal persons</b>
<i>Allium</i>	Joachim Keller (Germany); Dave Astley (UK)
<i>Brassica</i>	Eduardo Rosa (Portugal); Grégoire Thomas (France)
Umbellifer Crops	Teresa Kotlińska (Poland); Dave Astley (UK)
Solanaceae (eggplant, pepper, tomato)	Marie-Christine Daunay (France)
Cucurbits	Fernando Nuez (Spain)
Leafy vegetables	Ietje Boukema (The Netherlands); Aleš Lebeda (Czech Republic)

**Workplan (May 1999 - May 2000)**

The suggestion was made that the first meeting of the NCG be held at the Universidad Politécnica de Valencia, Spain. The proposed date is late May 2000.

To facilitate the preparation for the meeting, G. Thomas offered to draft a standard form which should be filled by the NCG members with the aim to review the Network progress and perspectives. The form should be distributed in early autumn 1999 and returned to IPGRI by the end of January 2000.

Existing workplans for the *Allium* and *Brassica* Working Groups were revised during the meeting. These are attached for the attention of the WG members.

Four EU funded (EC1467/94) projects for the conservation and use of vegetable (*Brassica*, Carrot, Eggplant, Melon) genetic resources are expected to start this year. Clearly the Vegetables Network will need to maintain a high interaction with these projects and to plan its activities in a complementary way. The occurrence of EU project meetings should be seen as an opportunity to hold joint ECP/GR meetings, especially in the case that funds are mobilized for the

cooperation of non EU countries with EU funded projects. A full integration of non EU partners in these projects is considered possible whenever the costs of complementary activities (such as evaluation, data computerization, virus cleaning, etc.) can at least partially be covered.

Dave Astley

Rome, 7 May 1999

Lorenzo Maggioni

Grégoire Thomas