



newsletter

for Europe

Inside this issue

ECPGR	1-6
EURISCO	7
EU 7th Framework	8
EUFORGEN	10-12
EVOLTREE	17
Fellowships	18
Forthcoming meetings	19

About this Newsletter

The International Plant Genetic Resources Institute (IPGRI) is one of the 15 Centres of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR). IPGRI's vision is that: "People today and in the future enjoy greater well-being through increased incomes, sustainably improved food security and nutrition, and greater environmental health, made possible by conservation and the deployment of agricultural biodiversity on farms and in forests."

IPGRI's Regional Office for Europe provides the Coordination Secretariats for the European Cooperative Programme for Plant Genetic Resources (ECPGR) and for the European Forest Genetic Resources Programme (EUFORGEN).

IPGRI publishes two issues of the Regional Newsletter for Europe a year. This Newsletter is intended to serve as an informal forum for the exchange of news and views, and to create closer ties within the genetic resources community in Europe. Previous issues are available from the IPGRI Web site: www.biodiversityinternational.org

A Russian version of this Newsletter is being produced and disseminated in collaboration with the N.I. Vavilov Research Institute of Plant Industry (VIR) in St. Petersburg.

We invite you to send your ideas and contributions for this Newsletter to IPGRI's Regional Office for Europe by Email to Biodiversity-Europe@cgiar.org. Please send all contributions for Issue 34 by 16 March 2007.

ECPGR Phase VII reaches mid-term

The tenth meeting of the ECPGR Steering Committee (SC), held in Riga, Latvia, on 5-8 September 2006 was the occasion to evaluate progress of the Networks since the onset of Phase VII (2004-2008) and to make plans for the future.

The fruitful collaboration between the hosting institutions, the University of Latvia and the Ministry of Agriculture, Republic of Latvia, enabled a successful event, which was the first ECPGR meeting ever to take place in Latvia. Representatives from 34 member countries were present, together with observers from 5 non-member countries and representatives of the European Seed Association (ESA), EUCARPIA, FAO, IPGRI, NGB and of the NGOs.

The status of implementation of the current Phase VII was reviewed, taking into account that 38 member countries currently participate in the Programme. Among the various practical and operational issues discussed, it is interesting to note that the SC decided to simplify the name of the Programme to "European Cooperative Programme for Plant Genetic Resources" and the acronym was also modified to "ECPGR", removing the traditional slash of "ECP/GR". Considering the increasing complexity of the Programme, the document prepared during this Phase describing the "Terms of reference for the ECPGR operational bodies" was appreciated as very useful and it was recommended that its scope be broadened to include further elements of clarification regarding



Meeting participants at the Monument of Freedom during an excursion in Riga, Latvia.
Photo: I. Rashal, Institute of Biology, University of Latvia

the role of "Working Group Chair", "Database Manager of an ECPGR Central Crop Database" and "Network Coordinator". The procedure for the election of the Working Group Chair and the duration of this position also needs to be clarified in the document.

The importance of involving the European Union as a member of ECPGR was reiterated. The SC decided that a short strategy paper should be formulated, to be addressed to the European Commission, in its capacity as a Party to the International Treaty.

Informative reviews of progress made by the Networks were welcomed by the SC members. The SC concluded that the Networks had given appropriate attention to the priority issues defined for Phase VII (Characterization and evaluation; Documentation and information; *In situ* and on-farm conservation and management; and Task sharing). Improvements in the status of collection data were recorded for most of the Working Groups, while the national inventories data made available through the EURISCO catalogue also had significantly increased. The

main progress in the area of *in situ* conservation was related to the EU-funded PGR Forum project, culminating in the achievement of a Crop Wild Relatives catalogue for Europe and the Mediterranean. Concepts of task sharing were adopted by most of the Working Groups, following the example and the influence of the AEGIS project (see below).

The priority issues defined for Phase VII were considered to be still valid for repositioning

during the next Phase, with "task sharing" being the top priority, but also adding the element of "capacity building", considering the additional need to devote part of the existing collaboration to enhancing the capacity of the less developed sectors of the European genetic resources community. Network Coordinators will be requested to provide a list of proposed actions for Phase VIII, including clearly measurable outputs. The SC also decided to assign a Task Force to define the appropriate division between WG meetings, actions and *ad hoc* meetings and to look at criteria that would enable evaluating the relevance of the proposed actions and outputs, as well as the ratio of distribution of ECPGR funds over the Networks.

The evaluation of the ECPGR-funded feasibility study on the establishment of A European Genebank Integrated System (AEGIS) concluded with the proposal that this work requires further consideration of the practical aspects of implementation of the AEGIS project.

(continued on page 2)

On-farm Conservation and Management Task Force meeting



Valeria Negri
Plant Biology and Agro-
environmental and Animal
Biotechnologies Dept.
Perugia University
Perugia, Italy
Email: vnegri@unipg.it

The Second meeting of the Task Force on On-farm Conservation and Management was held at Stegelitz, Germany on 19-20 June 2006, hosted by the Landesumweltamt des Landes Brandenburg (Eberswalde) and organized in collaboration with Rudolf Vögel. Delegates from 16 European countries attended the meeting.

Delegates discussed the concept and definition of landraces, the main on-farm conservation issues in Europe, the legislation status of conservation variety seed trading, and the possibility of developing methodologies for creating inventories and of

recording information in on-farm conservation. Experiences of landrace conservation were reviewed and project proposals to be submitted to the AGRI GEN RES 2nd call (EU Reg. 870/2004) were presented by Lothar Frese, Nigel Maxted and Valeria Negri.

Conditions for on-farm conservation of PGR in Europe vary considerably from country to country due to very different pedo-climatic and socio-economic realities. In Europe, like in other parts of the world, on-farm conservation of PGR is generally practiced on small farms growing traditional landraces or obsolete cultivars, but organic farmers, outdoor museums and similar institutions also play a role in this activity.

There are few studies of on-farm conservation in Europe. The few available examples show that cultivating landraces and old cultivars has certain advantages (e.g. cultivar adaptability to local conditions, better quality of product, demand for local niche products, traditional home consumption). However, the increasing age of traditional farmers and low willingness of the new generations to remain in agriculture, competition of 'modern' cultivars, weak landrace seed-supply, legislative constraints, low

level of coordination and lack of incentives all have a negative impact on on-farm conservation.

Landraces are probably the most threatened and neglected PGR of all. Very little attention is drawn to the importance of on-farm conservation as a dynamic strategy to allow populations to evolve with time and be in tune with the environment. The Task Force recognized the pressing need to improve public awareness on on-farm conservation issues at all levels, with each Task Force member committed to improving communication among stakeholders, also making use of the resources of the ECPGR Secretariat.

The need to strengthen links with farmers, farmer organizations, NGOs and amateurs respectively, was also highlighted.

Creating closer links with Crop Networks was also considered important. A visit to the Chorin Bioserve, near Stegelitz, where old cereal populations have been reintroduced in cultivation and to the VERN (Verein zur Erhaltung und Rekultivierung von Nutzpflanzen in Brandenburg) offices concluded the meeting.

A report of the meeting will be available from the ECPGR Web site.



A home garden in Sicily, Italy.
Photo: L. Maggioni, IPGRI

ECPGR Phase VII reaches mid-term

(continued from page 1)

The SC confirmed that the concept of AEGIS, which builds on national, regional and sub-regional activities, is to be a major European regional initiative to increase the efficiency and quality of germplasm collections' management and the utilization of these collections, as well as aiming to optimize the use of available resources. In-depth consideration of the future of AEGIS will need to be taken at the 11th meeting of the SC.

Areas requiring more detail before any decision can be taken include: criteria for the identification of Most Appropriate Accessions, development of quality management systems, an overview of estimated operational costs for collection maintenance before or after the introduction of AEGIS, development of a draft Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for signature by the Ministries, specifying the political consent of the national authorities for task sharing, and taking into account the relationship with the obligations of the International Treaty. The SC recommended that the ECPGR Secretariat initiates the process of further preparation of draft decisions and possible implementation mechanisms for the AEGIS concept as soon as possible. It also decided to reallocate part of the Network funds (150 000 euro) for immediate action. The Steering Committee also viewed a direct involvement of the European Union in realizing an integrated system of European collections as highly relevant and will seek to engage the European Commission in its work.

The recent developments of the International Treaty for PGRFA (IT) were thoroughly discussed. The SC welcomed the outcome of the first session of the Governing Body of the IT held in Madrid in June 2006. Conscious of the complementarity of the objectives of the IT and those of ECPGR, the SC encouraged those ECPGR member countries that have not yet ratified the IT to do so. For those ECPGR member countries which have ratified the IT, the SC wished to encourage full implementation at the national level as rapidly as possible, taking into account the specific conditions of the individual country.

A checklist of steps that might be taken from a technical and operational point of view to achieve the implementation of the Treaty was agreed upon and was included in the report of the meeting.

An invitation was made by the Director of the Nordic Gene Bank, Bent Skovmand to hold the next SC meeting in 2008 at Longyearbyen, Svalbard Islands, following construction of the facilities of the Svalbard International Seed Depository. The SC welcomed this invitation and will take it into consideration. The report of the meeting is available from the ECPGR Web site.