

## Promoting Organic Breeding in Europe

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Dear friends,

with the new year the quarterly **crop newsletter** is launched.

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Organic breeding is a great multiplier. However, its benefit as a common good is still largely unknown and therefore hardly acknowledged by the organic sector, on what level whatsoever. Organic breeding is generating benefits for agricultural production, biodiversity and the environment, but also for organic processors, wholesalers, retailers and last but not least the consumers. That's why organic breeding needs a stronger lobby and a more intensive support at all levels and from all stakeholders!

The study Seeds as a commons (Wirz, Kunz and Hurter 2017) has identified three problem areas that impede the further expansion of non-profit biological plant breeding in Europe:

**1. the ignorance of the almost complete dependence on conventional seed companies** by organic producers, processors and traders. For the time being, the dependence still amounts to 95 percent.

**2. the inadequate financing of organic breeding and seed production** through the companies in the organic value chain. This situation has not changed since the presentation of the study "Seed as a Commons" two years ago. The main idea presented for the first time in the study is as follows: On the whole food turnover of the organic sector, one per mille is levied at the point of sale to finance organic breeding. The estimates imply that such a crop plant permill would be able to cover the funding needs.

**3. the lack of promotion of young talents in breeding initiatives and seed companies.**

Need for action is mandatory for two reasons. First, according to the view of the EU Commission, by 2035 a new seed law should enforce organic quality from the seed to the field to the plate. Second, the working conditions for organic breeders must be improved in two ways. It is obvious that the younger breeder generation is reshaping the work-life balance in comparison to the pioneers, i.e. more equilibrated: more life, less work. In addition, well trained breeders are reluctant to join companies and institutions if project funding for three to four years is not guaranteed – this is unfortunately just a blue sky vision for most of the breeding organisations.

**The new project of the *Fund for Crop Plant Development* aspires to address and develop these issues** for all stakeholders & partners in the organic supply chain. A small initiative group with Peter Kunz and a new co-worker as chief responsables and Ueli Hurter and Johannes Wirz from the Section for Agriculture as advisory board is ready to take off. It will focus the attention on the current situation and develop solutions and their practical implementation together with all the players of the organic sector - producers, processors, wholesalers and retailers.

**A first meeting will take place from 6-9 February at the Agricultural Conference in Dornach.** Koos Bakker and Peter Kunz guide and moderate a workshop "Participation of the partners in the food chain on plant breeding".

At the **BioFach in Nuremberg (February 13-16)** the new financing models and initial prototypes for practical implementation were presented at the exhibition on organic breeding [Bio from the very beginning!](#)

**A training course for active breeders will start Jan 7, 2019** at Rengoldshausen/Überlingen Germany.

**These tasks are at the top priorities of Peter Kunz' list for the coming years.** They have become feasible by handing-over the [Getreidezüchtung Peter Kunz](#) in Feldbach to the younger generation. However, Peter will not withdraw from practical breeding completely, since there is one more question of utmost importance to him: *"Holistic quality research. It is very closely related to breeding in a broad context of understanding plant growth, fruit formation and ripening processes. An essay in the [Journal Culinaire](#) gives an introduction to this concept. A comprehensive study is planned with a range of 12 varieties each of four species of cereals in cooperation with the University of Bologna. The focus is on secondary metabolites which are crucial both for the growth and the health of the plants, as well as for the taste, their compatibility and digestibility. We are looking forward to sharing the results and will keep you informed in the next newsletter and on our website."*

With this New Year outlook we wish you a fruitful 2019!

Best regards

Peter Kunz, Ueli Hurter and Johannes Wirz

Feldbach, 06 Jan 2019

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