



Conference: Seeds as Commons

Thursday, 19 October 2017

10 a.m. – 2.30 p.m.

North Rhine-Westphalia Representative Office to the European Union, Rue
Montoyer 47, Brussels

Hosted by the Member of the European Parliament
Maria Heubuch (The Greens/ EFA)

The fundamental basis of all our food is seed. Each grain of seed has a long history: Generations of farmers and breeders have contributed to crossing and selecting for suitable cultivated crops. In the past 50 years, breeding activities underwent major changes: Plant breeding is nowadays increasingly in the hands of multinational shareholder companies. Plant varieties are not any more freely accessible for everyone: They are often subject to plant variety rights and an increasing amount of patentsⁱ. This profit-based seed system suppresses a wider diversity of breeding activities, which would be urgently needed to supply – not only organic - farmers with locally adapted plant varieties. The fact that small scale breeding activities often lack finances to support the necessary breeding facilities forms an additional obstacle for a seed system with a broader basis.

You are warmly invited to the conference “Seeds as Commons” which presents an analysisⁱⁱ of the current seed system.

- ✿ A plant variety is a **cultural common**.
- ✿ Through registration and protection, it becomes a **legal good**.
- ✿ On the counter of a seed seller, only, they are an **economic good**.

Alternative models to reconnect plant breeding with the society will be introduced, such as non-profit organic breeding initiatives and the OpenSourceSeedsⁱⁱⁱ initiative which aims to make seed a common good again. The panel of outstanding experts will engage in discussions around the question how to establish systems wherein organic plant breeding can best contribute to the availability of healthy food, the improvement of agrobiodiversity, vital ecosystems services and to resilience of our food system.

The conference invites policy makers, representatives of NGOs and other stakeholder associations to join the discussion.

Agenda

10:00 Registration & coffee

10:30 Introduction and welcome notes by

- ✿ Andreas Biesantz, Head of Office Demeter-International Brussels
- ✿ Maria Heubuch, MEP, Greens/EFA

10:50 Keynote speech: “**Seed as a Commons**” by Johannes Wirz, Researcher, Goetheanum Switzerland

An introduction to non-profit seed and breeding initiatives and an assessment of future perspectives (presentation of the [study](#).)

11:10 Speech: **The Open-Source Seed License** – a legal approach to securing seed commons. By Johannes Kotschi, OpenSourceSeeds / Agrecol, Marburg, Germany

11:30 Q & A

12:00 - 12:30 Lunch break - light lunch will be provided

12:30 Interventions and panel discussion

- Maria Heubuch, Member of the European Parliament
- Thomas Weber, European Commission
- Monika Messmer, President of the European Consortium for Organic Plant Breeding ([ECO – PB](#)) and researcher in [FiBL](#)
- Floriana Cimmarusti, Secretary General of Safe Food Advocacy Europe - [SAFE](#).
- Peter Kunz, organic plant breeder, [Getreidezüchtung Peter Kunz](#)
- Effimia Chatzinikolaou, [IFOAM EU Group](#)

Moderation: Antje Kölling, Head of the Policy and Public Relations Department of Demeter Germany

14:15 Conclusions & next steps, Alexander Gerber, Vice President Demeter-International

14:30 End

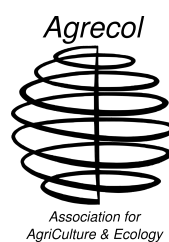
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ⁱ Plant variety rights (PVR), are rights granted to the breeder of a new variety of plant. They give the breeder exclusive control over the propagating material of a new variety for a number of years. The “breeder’s privilege” anyhow allows other breeders to make use of these varieties in their breeding work.

The use of patents in plant breeding are most controversial, as the intellectual property rights for patents go far beyond the rights granted with PVRs and even the breeders privilege does not apply. no-patents-on-seeds.org

ⁱⁱ The study “Saatgut Gemeingut” (Seeds as Commons) was published by Goetheanum – Section for Agriculture and Fonds für Kulturpflanzenentwicklung in January 2017. It shows the importance of seed as common good and explains how to develop seed sustainably and conserve it. The English translation of the study will be presented in this seminar, the German version can be found here: http://www.sektion-landwirtschaft.org/fileadmin/landwirtschaft/Saatgut_Gemeingut/saatgut_gemeingut_2_Auflage.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ www.opensourceseeds.org/en