



ESA 2010 ANNUAL MEETING

ANNUAL REPORT

Presented to the ESA General Assembly

12.10.2010

by

Garlich v. Essen, Secretary General



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Dear Members,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have the pleasure to present to you the Annual Report 2009/2010 and to recall some of the most important developments and decisions taken in our organisation, some of which will continue to impact the work of ESA also over the coming year.

Over the past 12 months, we engaged in a large number of activities related to those priorities defined for the year 2010 by you, the ESA membership, in the different competent ESA bodies, our Sections and Section Working Groups, the Committees and of course the Board.

In addition to these priorities, numerous additional horizontal as well as crop specific issues came up and were addressed in internal as well as external meetings. Many of them have been presented to you during the meetings of ESA's Sections earlier this week.

- I. Addressing the European seed industry's policy priorities
 - A European quality assurance for seed treatment and treated seed

The new European regulation for the authorization of plant protection products has brought about a number of concrete improvements for the mutual recognition of products for minor crops and markets as well as for the free movement of treated seed within the EU's common market.

This progress is not least the result of ESA's discussions with Commission, Member States and the European Parliament over the past years which created a growing awareness amongst decision makers that seed treatment is the technology of the future for crop protection, contributing to food security and environmental protection by a targeted and minimal use of pesticides.

While there is still a lot to be done in the practical implementation of the new legislation, there is now even more to be done to assure that seed industry and farmers will actually benefit from the new rules. A single incident in one Member State has in fact put much of what has been achieved by the ESA lobbying campaign on seed treatment into jeopardy.

But ESA has taken up this challenge and has made the establishing of an EU-wide quality assurance for seed treatment and treated seed, involving all relevant stakeholders and authorities, one of its top priorities for the year 2010.

Many of you, our association and companies, have committed specific funding for this project which allowed us to address this important subject with the necessary means – and I would like to express my sincere thanks to you for that.

During the different meetings yesterday and this morning, we have shown you where we are at this point in time. With Ruud Scheffer, whom many of you knew and many others now have met during this Annual Meeting, we have meanwhile contracted an expert in quality assurance management.

We have agreed on a focus on crops and products, on the process for developing the scheme – and last but not least – on the communication of a name and logo that is supposed to demonstrate both, the ownership of the future quality scheme by the European industry organized in ESA and thus to an industry led system of stewardship and quality standards and assurance processes.

But also to our common goal: to maintain and where necessary re-establish a true EU common market for treated seed.

The ESA Working Group on Seed Treatment and Technologies chaired by our member Jan Willem Breukink has worked hard over the past months and will continue to do so in the months to come to develop the ESTA, the European Seed Treatment Assurance, into a practical scheme that is properly applied by industry, supported by authorities and accepted by the public.

It is our firm intention to be ready for implementation for the first priority crops for the campaign 2011, so for the harvest and treatment of seed in summer and fall next year.

- ESA's view on Intellectual Property and plant breeding

Ladies and gentlemen, intellectual property protection is key for supporting research and innovation in plant breeding. Assuring a fair return of plant breeders' long term investment fuels the continuous development of ever better varieties for a competitive and sustainable European agri-food chain.

Here, the classical variety protection of the EU's plant breeders rights legislation is a critical instrument for the breeding community; but this instrument has shown some weaknesses, e.g. in the area of fair royalty payments for farm saved seed use, as has been shown by studies carried out by ESA itself as well as by the Community's responsible plant variety office.

With the announced evaluation of this legislation -which has just formally started with a first questionnaire to stakeholders- , but foremost in view of the increasing role of patents for biotechnological inventions, ESA had decided that it was time to revisit its view on the role and the appropriate instruments for intellectual property protection in the seed sector.

I will not go into any detail here as the result of the work so far will be presented to you extensively during this afternoon's open part of the General Assembly.

But I would like to underline that one of the key tasks for ESA as an organisation has been to assure a wide consultation of all ESA members and proper consideration of all relevant aspects. To do so, we organised a very well attended conference in spring of this year - and the arguments and conclusions from this conference have been included in the further debate within the relevant ESA bodies, foremost our Committee for Intellectual Property Rights (CIPR) and our Board.

May I take this opportunity to thank the members of the CIPR, and here specifically Marian Suelmann as Chair of the Committee, and Szonja Csorgo from the Secretariat, for the hard work and the strong commitment to assure a fair and transparent process in this difficult - and sometimes quite controversial- discussion.

Dear Szonja, you are now with ESA for only a little more than a good year - and you already have left a strong mark with your enthusiasm and expertise.

As an organization, we are lucky to have found such a competent person. Personally, I am delighted to have you on our team.

- New legal frameworks for seed marketing, plant health and GMOs

Over the past 12 months, the work on the evaluation of the EU's legal frameworks for seed marketing, plant health and cultivation and use of GMOs moved forward with continuous involvement of stakeholders in consultations, impact assessments and specific technical meetings.

Soon, first drafts of legislative proposals will emerge.

Together with the new evaluation of the Community's legislation for plant variety protection just mentioned before, this means that all constitutional pillars of the seed industry's legal framework are now under review.

This overall review process provides an important opportunity for the seed sector to contribute to the shaping of a regulatory framework for the coming decade and beyond that is fit for purpose, fit to promote research and innovation, to strengthen the competitiveness of the European agri-food sector, contribute to food security and to help bring about the knowledge based bio-economy envisaged by EU's leaders as Europe's answer to sustainability and environmental protection.

ESA has brought in all its experience and expertise in the many different technical and political discussions, most recently at the EU's high level conference on the future EU plant health law, held in Brussels just two weeks ago.

But it is imperative for ESA to be able to provide such information and data not only to experts but increasingly to politicians, third parties and the interested public.

We will therefore make this one of our internal priorities in the coming months. To further develop and extend our communication to society and decision makers on what plant breeding has to offer, as a contribution in addressing the big economic, social and environmental challenges of the future, from climate change and reduction of our carbon footprint to biodiversity, competitiveness and economic growth.

The ESA biodiversity brochure which has been shared with you as well as politicians on national and EU level but also with a number of international organizations like e.g. the FAO, the CBD and with NGOs active in this area is our first example for this outreach. Similar work is under way on subjects such as sustainability, biotechnology, Better Regulation etc..

II. Improving management and service to the members

Dear Members,

At last year's General Assembly, I informed you about a number of changes in our internal management and our further plans in the re-focussing of procedures, tools and general communication activities.

Meanwhile, you have hopefully had a chance to appreciate the further professionalisation of our website which now includes search functions, facilitated print options, a clearer structure and updated links.

We have increased our communication activities to the membership, e.g. by our monthly ESA Newsletter as well as ad-hoc ESA Infos, press releases and regular updates of our homepage with latest news on issues of interest to the plant breeding community,

In addition, we have developed and shared a number of communication tools as e.g. overviews with contacts details of relevant Members of the European Parliament, sorted by Committee and Member State, an overview of the responsible Commission services, Cabinets and Commissioners.

These tools will be regularly updated and shall provide a solid base for an increase of our planned outreach to decision makers as well as the public at large.

I would like to specifically thank Sabine Bausch and Marguerite Ryan from the ESA team for all the hard work they have put into these efforts, for assuring that we keep to our self-established deadlines and procedures and thus to make certain that we as Secretariat are a reliable partner to you, our members, and to your colleagues in the companies and associations that equally rely on our information and documentation.

And we want to do still more and better in the future !

I am confident that we have laid a solid base for the increased communication activities in the coming twelve months.

I am also convinced that with these improvements, we not only responded to concrete wishes of the membership but that we also will take ESA as an organisation to the next level as an effective and efficient communicator for the whole seed industry in Europe.

III. Other important activities

I would like to briefly mention a few other important activities of which some have also been presented to you more extensively during the different meetings over the past days:

- combating infringement of IPRs

Combating infringements of breeders' intellectual property rights has increasingly moved to the focus of our work in ESA - and beyond !

The creation of AIB, the Anti Infringement Bureau of vegetable seed companies, and of Breeders Trust, an organisation of potato breeders, clearly demonstrates the importance of this issue.

And it also demonstrates that companies are willing to invest in expertise and effective structures in this area.

I am delighted that both enforcement organisations, AIB and Breeders Trust, have applied for associate membership in ESA. With this, we will have a strong base for coordinating activities and avoid double work.

Next to infringements of breeders IP rights, illegal marketing activities have been addressed in some of our Sections.

Next to illegal marketing and use of farm saved seed beyond the own holding of farmers, it has been specifically the mis-declaration of products (you all are aware of the famous “bird feed” imports that miraculously end up as high quality grass seeds in some Member States) and the marketing of seed of varieties not listed on the Common Catalogue that have been addressed.

Another practical example where such activities were at least suspected, is the one of mustard seed which was presented to you in detail during the meeting of our Oil and Fibre Section.

I would like to make use of this occasion to specifically thank Bert Scholte. Bert has spent a lot of time and energy on these issues, has visited and discussed with companies and associations as well as with official bodies on EU and Member State level; he organised respective grow out trials and he has driven the agenda of the Sections concerned.

You all have been informed about the Code of Conduct of forage and grass seed companies that has been signed by a large number of companies - just before this year’s European Seed Trade meeting.

The adoption of this code and the strong signal it sends to the sector (and beyond) not least is the result of Bert's specific expertise and engagement.

I am convinced –and it has been confirmed during the past year as well as our meeting over the past days- that this work is very much appreciated by our membership.

We are still working for a general, horizontal ESA Code of Conduct which we plan to adopt in the ESA Board at its meeting of March 2011.

So also here, we plan to more, not less, in 2011.

IV. Sound finances

Ladies and gentlemen,

The activities I just described in this Annual Report and the many more activities you have been informed about and have participated to in the different ESA Sections, Working Groups and Committees can only be carried out on the basis of sound finances.

Sound finances are precondition for a sustainable interest representation of this industry in the future.

Following many years with substantial surpluses, we have come to a turning point where expenditures are no longer met by the contributions; contributions which have been kept stable since the creation of ESA in 2000.

Doing less to save money is not an option before the background of all our regulatory framework coming up of for review and revision over the coming 3 to 5 years.

These coming years will be decisive in shaping the future for Europe's seed industry; investing in this, the shaping of your own future, is an important investment decision to be taken.

As announced in 2009, the ESA Board charged a special Working Group to elaborate a new fee structure that will help us to assure an appropriate level of financial means to carry out the tasks that our growing membership assigns to ESA.

And to reflect the reality of the growing importance of companies within ESA and consequently their responsibility for the decision making in our organisation.

The proposed new fee structure has been discussed extensively, not least in the meetings of the ESA Board and of the Secretary Generals earlier this week - and has been widely supported!

We are convinced that it will enable your organisation to continue to meet your high and growing expectations and we count on your support for this important decision later today.

V. A true European organisation

At the last ESA Annual Meeting, you decided on new Statutes and new Rules of Procedure for the organisation to adapt to a changing and faster moving political, regulatory and business environment.

Europe today is more than the European Union; Europe encompasses a wider cultural, political and economic area with countries such as e.g. Russia, the Ukraine and Turkey.

Consequently, the new Statutes have opened our organisation for full membership of all European countries –

and we opened ESA for an associate membership beyond Europe; to make it a platform of discussion and exchange that reflects the business reality of this highly globalised sector.

Later today, the General Assembly will decide on the membership of more than 10 new ESA members –

which is proof that the changes effected last year have indeed made our organisation even more attractive!

Further contacts to seed organisations in countries such as the Ukraine have been established and will hopefully result in respective membership applications in the coming months.

Furthermore, ESA and EESNET, the Eastern European Seed Network, have agreed on the full integration of EESNET into ESA which will be marked by a special meeting in Prague on November 22nd.

With that, 10 years after the foundation of ESA as well as EESNET, ESA will truly become the single voice of the wider European seed industry.

But in Prague, we will also discuss how we can best serve our growing and diverse membership from all parts of Europe, how we will make sure that the opinion of all of our members is well heard and appreciated and integrated in our decision making procedures.

To do so, ESA has to adapt. We want to and we have to move closer to the members to facilitate discussions and exchange. The fact that you will be asked to support the proposal to hold our 2011 Annual Meeting not in Brussels but in Budapest is one important element in this quest.

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to end this Annual Report 2010 with a few personal words.

I have already thanked the ESA team, Szonja, Bert, Marguerite and Sabine, for their support and contributions over the past 12 months. I am happy to head such a very competent and motivated team; and I am delighted of the amicable working relationship in the Secretariat to which all of you contribute – and sincerely thank you for that.

My thanks go to all of you, to the ESA Members.

You have supported the organisation and the Secretariat over the past year with the high level of personal engagement that is so very special for this industry.

I know that we ask a lot. A lot of time, a lot of input, a lot of commitment. I sincerely hope that despite these demands and the scarce personnel in companies and national associations you will continue this unique contribution to your organisation.

ESA is and has become what you all have made it – a lively, highly active, competent and -hopefully- stimulating platform for discussion, expertise and experience in all aspects related to plants and seed.

Finally, my thanks go to the ESA Executive Committee with President Christoph Amberger, Vice-President Gerard Backx and Treasurer Aad van Elsen who have guided me in managing and leading our association over the past twelve months.

Foremost, these thanks go -of course- to President Christoph Amberger.

Dear Christoph,

our regular discussions and meetings over the past year have been a source of inspiration and personally, I have profited a lot from your wealth of experience and expertise.

I am very thankful for all the good advice you have given me, for your patience, your friendliness and collegial approach.

It is a pleasure to work for you as President of ESA.

Dear Members,

ladies and gentlemen,

I thank you for your attention.