



Issue 1, summer 2014

Welcome to the Summer 2014 newsletter of Seedsavers NL!

Many exciting things have happened in the last few months. Our organization has seen some important changes. We've joined an exciting new European seed alliance, and have legally formalized our organization.

In addition to news about us, questions and confusion over the situation concerning the EU seed law is widespread. In this newsletter, we'll try to provide a summary of the latest developments, and things to watch out for in the future.

U kunt de nederlandse versie hier vinden:

<http://seedsavers.nl/nl/newsletter>

Seedsavers NL organisation achieves official status

A few weeks ago Seedsavers NL reached 44 members, and we are growing at the rate of a few new members a month. About 1/3 each of our members are in the areas of Amsterdam and the Hague. The remaining third are mostly in the Netherlands and Belgium, but we also have members in France, the Czech Republic and the Isle of Man. We are now an official association.



Iemke, Tayfun and Patrick celebrating Seedsavers NL's new official status.

In June, Iemke as secretary, Tayfun as treasurer, and Patrick as chair visited the notary and created a formal association. This allows us to open a bank account and to enter into legal agreements for the organization.

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We are also hard at work organizing workshops, first in Amsterdam and The Hague, then hopefully other places in the Netherlands.

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Our first workshop schedule has just been published on our website. We are also looking for solutions to facilitate the exchange of seeds between members. This includes things like planning seed swaps, implementing online seed swapping and expanding our base seed collection. Initially we will offer two workshops:

- Science of Organic Gardening
- Introduction to Seed Saving and Plant Breeding

We hope to expand this selection as soon as we can, and hope other members will help spread their knowledge by offering workshops too.



An important philosophy of Seedsavers NL is that members should meet and get to know each other. We will certainly have a few informal car trips this year bringing members together, and hope to arrange more formal get-togethers as the organization grows and we have more clusters of members living in the same areas. ☺

Newsletter design and photos pages 2-4: Mitzi Waltz

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Seed Freedom Europe alliance: Stronger together

Seedsavers NL is very excited to be part of the creation and be a member of a new European alliance between seed organizations.

The Seed Freedom Europe alliance confirmed core group members include:

- Kokopelli France
- Kokopelli Belgium
- Kokopelli Switzerland
- Peliti (Greece)
- Eco Ruralis (Romania)
- Navdanya International (Italy)
- Seedsavers NL (Netherlands)

Beyond this core group we have several associated organizations, including many in Latin America. We expect to expand in the near future.

This new alliance is based on the principles outlined and already published by Dr. Vandana Shiva and her organization Navdanya. In particular it's the goal of the alliance to oppose any restrictions or legal obstacles on the use, possession, sale or exchange of open pollinated plant varieties not protected with intellectual property rights, or any plant or plant products grown from these seeds.

The purpose of this alliance is we are friends, broadly agree with one another, and want to act like friends. We want to support one another with capacity building, cultural exchange and lobby efforts to reform the EU seed laws. We want to cooperate with other like-minded alliances and initiatives.

Together with this European alliance, there are already similar partner alliances being formed in Latin America and Asia, and soon probably other regions of the world. Seedsavers NL is very excited to be part of this new group of global Seed Freedom alliances. ☺

EU Seed Law: An update

Lobbying for realistic and fair seed laws

There's been quite a storm in a teacup with the latest efforts to reform the EU seed law. Quite a lot of misinformation has been spread.

Changes to the EU seed law were recently proposed by the EU Commission. This is the executive branch of the EU government. The proposal was submitted to the EU Parliament (similar in function to the US House of Representatives) and the EU Council of Ministers (similar to the US Senate).

Broadly, the proposal to update existing seed laws followed the same principles of existing law. Most importantly, this means that the law first banned all seeds for use in agriculture, then make some exceptions -- primarily for industrial agriculture. Nearly all allowed seeds first had to be registered as a particular variety, and so first had to pass distinct, uniform and stable (DUS) tests. In some cases these varieties also have to pass tests for value for cultivation and use (VCU), indicating their suitability for use in large monocultures.

In the real world, tests like DUS and VCU have no purpose. They have nothing to do with food safety, quality or increasing yields.

Two new exemptions were introduced recently, for so-called niches and heterogenous material. Both of these exceptions caused quite a lot of confusion, mostly because they were not clearly defined to begin with. There were also so many restrictions both initial and proposed amendments that threatened to undermine the principles of these exceptions, that no one really knew what they meant or what they were going to mean in the end.

In particular, the niche provision received a lot of support from farming organizations, because it seemed to both allow some exemptions for small farmers, and prevented some competition from larger corporations.

This exemption was strongly opposed both by the agricultural industry, which didn't agree with exemptions for small farmers, and seed saving organizations, which didn't feel the exemptions went far enough. There were some very heated discussions and debates on the issue.

Major lobbying efforts came from Austrian seed saving organization Arche Noah, who has two fulltime paid staff working on the issue. In particular, together with about 50 European partner organizations, they created sufficient 'lobbying noise' to make it clear to the European politicians that there was widespread public opposition to these changes in the law.

The proposed law was rejected by the Parliament, and current plans of the Commission are to soon resubmit a slightly modified version again to the Parliament and Council. In the meantime, we have had parliamentary elections in Europe, and the new parliament is not likely to be any more friendly to the issue. There will also soon be new commissioners appointed in the EU Commission, and there's hope they will have a more realistic perspective on seed law issues.

Seedsavers NL will continue to work with our partners, and lobby for realistic and fair seed laws, that do not restrict the use of public domain open pollinated varieties. ☺





Seedsavers NL needs your support!

We are a very fast growing organization, both in terms of members and scope. We are trying to set up both a conservation garden and food forest, at the same time providing access to genetic and educational resources.

We would like to expand our lobbying efforts. We have expenses like travel, administration and promotional costs. We would like to be able to take one or two people on as paid staff. We have virtually no possibility of covering these costs with membership fees alone.

Donations in any amount, large and small, are very much appreciated.

Donations can be made to our bank account NL82 INGB 0006 5939 62, in the name of Seedsavers NL, Amsterdam.