

**Minutes of the ECO_AB Annual General Meeting
Held at 12 mid day on Sunday June 21st, 2009
University of Bristol, Somerset, UK**

Present: Wytze Nauta (Louis Bolk Instituut; president), Anet Spengler (FiBL), Lotta Rydhmer (SLU, Sweden), Joanne Conington (SAC, Scotland; minutes keeper), Joannie Leroyer (ITAB, France) Anna Wallenbeek (SLU, Sweden), (Therese Sundberg (SLU, Sweden),

Apologies : Ton Baars, Gunter Postler, Peter Løvendahl, Uli Schumachar, Veronica Maurer

Guests: Amélie Legrand (Compassion in World Farming), Sabrina Brando (Animal Concepts, The Netherlands), Jascha Leenhouders (IPG, The Netherlands), Marc Bracke (ASG, Lelystad)

I General Meeting

1. Activity report (W. Nauta)

Members: By the end of 2008 Eco AB had 10 registered members: organisations from the following countries: Norway, Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, France, Poland, United Kingdom, Denmark.

The board: The board of Eco AB has been changed as Beat Bapst has been replaced by Anet Spengler Neff from FiBL, who is also the new secretary.

Activities: The 1st general meeting of Eco AB took place at the University of Modena in Modena, Italy. About 30 people attended this meeting. Anet Spengler was elected as a new board member of Eco AB.

The 2nd Eco-AB workshop about organic animal breeding was organised alongside the IFOAM conference in June 2008. Around 30 people joined this workshop. Joanne Conington, Peter Løvendahl, Wytze Nauta and Anet Spengler presented their animal breeding projects. A discussion on the general ideas and backgrounds of organic animal breeding was started.

Wytze Nauta and Anet Spengler organised a scientific workshop for the World Breeding Conference of IFOAM in Santa Fe (USA) in August 2009. Anet Spengler is a member of the steering committee of this conference. Several Eco AB members have sent in an abstract for this conference.

2. Finances (Anet Spengler)

Eco-AB opened an account at FiBL (research institute of organic agriculture in Switzerland), which is administered by the FiBL-book keeper.

Member organisations got invoices for their membership fee in 2008. The fee for full members amounts to €1000.

There is no bank account for ECO-AB but ECO-AB has a project code within FIBL and FiBL therefore does also the financial check.

There is now a surplus of €3,367.31. Lotta Rydhmer and Anet Spengler proposed to lower the fee until more activities require us to spend more money. But the majority of the members decided not to lower it: the membership fee is to remain the same as 2008/2009 (€1000) for members and €100 for associate members. But we want to encourage members to use the surplus for small projects, especially for cooperative work between members. All members can propose such projects (send them in to the secretary), preferably cooperative projects (e.g. master thesis, student exchanges etc.). This can stimulate the contacts between members.

The members agreed with the account of 2008.
Lotta Rydhmer agreed to act as an accountant for the Eco-AB-account in 2009.

Ton Baars is the treasurer, but has not much time anymore for this task. He will do the job until the end of the year 2009. Within the board someone else can take over this task. Joanne Connington offered to do it.

3. Website

The website: www.eco-ab.org is used for presenting news, activities and reports of Eco AB and related organisations.

The website needs more work. Members should give material for websites – but permissions are often needed for articles. In this case we can put links on the website to the (abstracts of) papers, if permissions can't be provided. A short description of the papers & articles should be given.

4. AOB

It was questioned what we get for our membership? For now there are free workshops, contacts, action from Eco-AB for pushing activities for research on organic breeding (like now in TP-Organics).

We also asked ourselves why we did not charge the guests for this workshop? It was because of hospitality. Next time we will charge a fee. This will probably also give more engagement.

ECO AB should also take part in the set up of a technical platform TP-Organics. Wytze will take care of that. Also within IFOAM we should set up an additional livestock working group function to be led by ECO-AB.

Action: Wytze will contact them

5. Next meeting

Lotta Rydhmer proposed to have our next general meeting during the “World Congress on Genetics Applied Livestock Production” (WCGALP) in Leipzig (Germany) in August 2010.

Action: Lotta will ask the congress board, if they could organize an organic session or if we should organize an Eco-AB-Workshop there.

The AGM closed at 13.30 p.m.

II 3rd Eco AB Workshop

- 1. Anna Wallenbeck, Wytze Nauta and Anet Spengler gave presentations of their thesis (see separate papers).**
- 2. Unfortunately Mrs. Helen Browning (food and farming director of the soil association), who was supposed to give an industry viewpoint and recommendations for organic animal breeding could not come to the workshop.**
- 3. Discussion in 4 working groups on 4 questions around organic animal breeding.**

The main points of the discussions were:

Question 1 “What evidence exists that animal breeding for organic systems should differ from conventional farming practices?”

1. G x E different countries
2. Cultural differences
3. weighting traits differently
4. Converting forage into protein efficiently – how do we do this best?
5. Dual purpose breeds needed
6. Technologies – should not automatically dismiss them all. Should be evaluated individually. Eg sexed semen is good for animal welfare yet banned in Switzerland.
7. should consider what consumers think about using new technologies as to whether we should use them in organic systems.

Question 2 “What differentiates breeding practices in organic systems?”

1. Need to define what is going on now – and what should be the goal for differentiation.
2. Not any differences - only one restriction – not allowed to use ET on farm but can use bulls created from ET.(In Switzerland it is not allowed to use bulls from ET, in Netherlands this is the case for BD farming).
3. Use the right breed for right environment. In the rules for organic production this is now only a recommendation. As they are not restrictions, most farmers don't adhere to the term “use breeds that can adapt to the local situation”.
4. Shouldn't break 'cycles'. Should not have single purpose breeding. Use more dual-purpose breeds in the future. If the purpose is sex-linked then avoid wastage of males in these systems.
5. Reasons for refusing techniques are for Welfare, 'naturalness' reasons, sustainability but defining the border is tricky.
6. Need to record functional traits more widely. Need stronger arguments FOR organic.
7. GWS – how to deal ? Farmers want to be involved. Breeding is going away from farmers. Should be organic nucleus herds to phenotype & test the SNPs . Should not reject it but use as restriction - eg use only in animals that are born (vs unborn embryos).
8. Either 'go along' with conventional breeding methods or 'going it alone' . breeding own replacements.

Question 3 “How should planned breed improvements be integrated into our livestock populations?”

1. Cooperative breeding structures; Pure line, lined genetically, crossbreeding
2. Nucleus breeding schemes; Open vs. closed
3. Sow pools in Sweden – sent back to the farms
4. Organic multiplier herds – producing replacement gilts for organic systems.
5. Organic boar list – recommended using an organic index.
6. Young bull system e.g. Guernsey breed described by Wytze after a paper from Bishard, 2007. Slaughter young bulls but keep semen.

Use of AI? In Holland – almost everything is AI'd.

Further actions

The above points should be written up in full as a statement that ECO-AB can make on the main points of discussion above. They can then be sent onto Helen Browning / other key players in the organic associations to see if they agree/ where they differ. This then can be used as future guidelines for organic regulating authorities for breeding for organic systems. Wytze Nauta and Anet Spengler will integrate those points into the workshop on reproductive techniques in organic animal breeding at the IFOAm-breeding-conference in Santa Fe.