

VEGNET NCG Letter to the Steering Committee

In an extraordinary meeting on 18 April 2008, the VEGNET NCG (Chairs & Vice Chairs) met to prepare the work plan & budget for Phase VIII of ECPGR.

Following the VEGNET letter to the Steering Committee in July 2007 the Secretariat redrafted the SC comment re the prioritization of Working Groups in the Riga report: *"NCGs are strongly encouraged to indicate priority ("active") Working Groups, since the funding limitation may not allow full operation of all the Working Groups. Should a Network prefer to avoid prioritization, it has to submit a written and motivated request to that aim to the SC that then decides on the request"*.

The VEGNET NCG reflected on the comments of the SC, but reaffirmed their view that the Network will be better served by not prioritizing the Working Groups in Phase VIII. We discussed the reasoning behind the low prioritization of Working Groups (*Allium*, *Brassica* & *Solanaceae*) in Phase VII in order to allow the other VEGNET Working Groups (*Cucurbit*, *Leafy Vegetables* & *Umbellifers*) to develop to an equivalent level. The NCG members agreed that the six Working Groups are now, more or less, at a similar level of achievement. One of the main conclusions was that differences in level of budget do not necessarily produce significantly different results in WG performance. The outputs of Working Groups depend on the level of activities of the national representatives within each Group. It was recognized that the *Allium* and *Brassica* WGs (low priority) produced significant results because both were exemplar crops in the AEGIS project. Even though the *Solanaceae* WG was new at the beginning of Phase VII it was ranked as a low priority Group, however, a number of highly committed members developed databases, minimum descriptors and regeneration guidelines.

The NCG developed ideas for the VEGNET work plan for phase VIII and agreed that all Working Groups will benefit from a unified approach to the implementation of the AEGIS philosophy. We foresee that the final reports of the AEGIS model crop Working Groups will provide the basis for the development of implementation schedules for the VEGNET Working Groups. In order to promote the development of all Working Groups at the same rate in phase VIII the draft VEGNET budget proposal includes a full VEGNET/AEGIS themed meeting, once the AEGIS methodology of implementation is established (2009-2010). Subsequently, individual Working Groups will meet at a time of their choice in order to evaluate progress and further promote the Network/Working Group plans and activities. This will only be achievable through equal levels of funding for all Working Groups.

The main goals for the VEGNET in Phase VIII are i) to increase the levels of safety duplication for all collections, ii) to develop appropriate mechanisms for the identification of Most Appropriate Accessions (MAA). In addition, VEGNET will agree quality standards for the future maintenance of AEGIS accessions and the Central Crop Data Bases (CCDB) will be adapted to indicate MAAs.

In phase VIII work related to the four priority topics of ECPGR will be continued, as appropriate. The CCDBs will be improved by adding minimum descriptor fields and new data, (passport & characterization). The six Vegetables Network WGs have produced project proposals with budget outlines for Phase VIII for consideration by the SC. The VEGNET NCG considers this is the best way to stimulate progress in all the WGs and promote their development within the framework of the AEGIS programme.

At the full VEGNET meeting in Olomouc in 2007 the WG members agreed unanimously that all future VEGNET reports will be published electronically. The VEGNET NCG has not therefore included a cost in our budget for printed publications. We recognize that the Secretariat will maintain a level of service for editing and compilation on-line and that such costs will be covered within the Secretariat.

VEGNET WORK PLAN FOR PHASE VIII

At an extraordinary meeting on 18 April 2008 the VEGNET NCG developed ideas for the VEGNET work plan for Phase VIII and agreed that all Working Groups will benefit from a unified approach to the implementation of the AEGIS philosophy. In order to achieve this unified approach to AEGIS the Working Groups will convene at a VEGNET meeting with a themed programme concentrating on all aspects of AEGIS. This meeting is scheduled for 2009 or 2010 depending upon the progress of the AEGIS programme, the results of the exemplar crop groups and the Steering Committee recommendations on AEGIS for Phase VIII.

The VEGNET AEGIS meeting will lay the foundations for the individual Vegetable Working Groups to carry out their own programmes through meetings, inputs-in-kind and project work. The Working Groups will meet at a time of their choice suitable to promote these developments. The Vegetable Working Groups have developed work plans, project proposals and skeleton meeting schedules in order to present their work plans and budget options to the Steering Committee.

PROJECT COORDINATION

The VEGNET coordination will be carried out by the network coordinating group. VEGNET is a large network consisting of 6 working groups. Most of the work of the NCG is achieved by email and so we would like to propose an increase the membership of the NCG to incorporate all the WG Chairs and Vice Chairs, some of whom represent more than one WG. The cost to the VEGNET budget will be minimal and the Working Group members will have better representation on this decision making body. We ask that the SC endorse what we see as a positive suggestion.

