

## **An European Network for bean improvement: PHASELIEU**

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Bean is an important legume for human consumption in Europe, where the sold between exports/imports is minus 360000 t in 1998 (both *Phaseolus* and *Vigna* beans are included). So an improved sustainable and more economic common bean production, leading to high quality products would, on one hand, contribute to the diversification of agricultural systems and the development of more environmental friendly agricultural practices. On the other hand it would allow for an increased independence from the world market characterised by cost fluctuation and unpredictable supply.

This need for an integrated strategy for the improvement of *Phaseolus* production in Europe for human consumption promoted some initiatives of European research groups in the last years. At last the PHASELIEU Concerted Action ("Improvement of sustainable *Phaseolus* production in Europe for human consumption") started in 1998 funded by the European Commission (FAIR5-PL97-3463). The general aims of this project are: 1) the establishment of an European wide network of experts, including the scientific exchange as training visits 2) the organization of thematic workshops and 3) the publication of scientific and technical documents.

Regarding the European *Phaseolus* network, the initial group included 13 research teams from Spain, Portugal, France, Belgium, The Netherlands, United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, Austria and Israel as well as international organizations as IPGRI (International Plant Research Institute), CIAT (Centro Internacional de Agricultura Tropical) and AEP (Association Européenne de recherche sur les Protéagineux).

After two years of project, several research groups from France, Greece, Belarus, Bulgaria, Albania and Russia have contacted the PHASELIEU organization and supported by the web site (<http://www.cesga.es/phaselieu>) a permanent network is growing along Europe. To facilitate contacts among bean scientists, the web site includes a directory and a electronic interactive catalogue including human resources and facilities in *Phaseolus* research trough Europe is under preparation.

With the aim of preventing the duplication of *Phaseolus* research and other activities both nationally and regionally, the project organizes periodically **thematic workshops** - the milestones of the project itself - to discuss progress made in bean research and to coordinate activities and exchanges of scientists inside the PHASELIEU group and other European teams.

From the four workshops celebrated (Spain and Belgium - 1998; Italy and Austria - 1999), it must be emphasized the agreement of the group in the need for transnational research in areas as the following ones:

- ▶ genetic transformation methodology
- ▶ seed quality
- ▶ production improvement under different stress conditions
- ▶ molecular markers for assisted selection
- ▶ integrated farming systems and crop protection
- ▶ landrace biodiversity.
- ▶ *Rhizobium* symbioses

A main aspect of PHASELIEU are the publications. Two **Technical Reports** (01 and 02) have been published during 1998 and three more will be edited during the life of the project. Two **Handbooks** on Germplasm Evaluation and Laboratory Methods are on-going and at last, by electronic means, a **Newsletter** is published periodically in the web site, mainly with the contents of the technical presentations from the workshops.

Finally, as a relevant outcome of this project it must be mentioned the research proposal in the field of abiotic stress and biotic stress on beans arising from the member of the network inside the Fifth Framework Programme of the European Union.

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