



*Organisers:*  
**Kaol Kozh**  
**APLFBB/Bio Breizh**  
**Réseau Semences Paysannes (RSP)**

## ***Report of the event***

**Saturday, March 14th**

The first morning was used for small introductions of the participants. Beside the French organisers and members of this initiatives, people from Spain (Red Andaluza de Semillas), England (Garden Organic) and Austria (Arche Noah) joined the workshop in Brittany.

The presentations started with an introduction to Kaol Kozh. This is a kind of seed organisation with the main objective to improve biodiversity in Brittany (pour le développement de la biodiversité en Bretagne). The name is a small wordplay. It means “old cabbage” in Breton language but in Russian something like “commons”. Kaol Kozh was established in 2007 in the context of a participatory plant breeding program. The objectives were to screen old and new varieties for their suitability for organic agriculture and to make seeds available. Furthermore the organisation wants to conserve genetic resources of crop plants and support their adaptation to the growing conditions in Brittany. From the very beginning participatory development of new varieties became part of the initiative. Due to the very restrictive seed law in France an organisation like Koal Kozh is an important step to facilitate the seed exchange between farmers and to conserve diversity. In the practical work a great emphasis is placed on different cultivars of *Brassica oleracea* (e.g. 'Violet du Cap') and on a local pink onion variety ('Oignon de Roscoff').

Bio Breizh is a cooperative that bring together organic farmers and retailers. At the moment there are 54 vegetable growers (800 ha open field, 15 ha polytunnels) producing about 10000 tonnes, that make 10 % of the French organic vegetable production. Due to the mild winters near the coast the Brittany climate is very good for growing cauliflowers for the export during

the cold season. Despite cauliflower the most important crops are potato, carrot, shallot, broccoli, artichoke, leek, tomato and onion. Compared to the EU-Eco-regulation the provisions of Bio Breizh are more strict. In the area of seeds Bio Breizh wants to support independent farmer seed systems. At the moment the majority of organic cauliflower production is made out of hybrid varieties, but the organisation is trying to increase the proportion of population varieties. There is great awareness that there are more and more CMS-hybrids on the formal seed market, which aren't compatible with the principles of organic agriculture. Today Bejo is the only relevant seed company that still offers CMS-free hybrid varieties and it's not clear for how long these varieties will be available. So Bio Breizh wants to support alternative approaches to plant breeding.

PAIS is an experimental station for organic production attached to the Lycée Agricole de Suscinio near the city of Morlaix. At the moment there are 1,5 full-time employed researchers working together with farmers and students. One main activity is to screen and evaluate commercial varieties and genetic resources under the growing conditions in Brittany. Together with several farmers and Véronique Chable (INRA) PAIS is also working on a participatory plant breeding program with the main objective to reduce the dependency from hybrid varieties of *Brassica oleracea*. Furthermore there is research on pest management, functional biodiversity and mechanization.

In the afternoon we visited the farm from René Léa who is member of Kaol Kozh and for many years involved in participatory breeding and seed multiplication. Together with his family René is growing food on 20 ha. Since 1991 the farm is managed organic. First he produced for the wholesale market but in recent years the farm was dedicated to direct-marketing via vegetable boxes. René is one of the most engaged farmer breeders in the network. At the moment he is doing selection work on about ten varieties (cauliflower, cabbage,...). The intensity of selection depends on the variability of the variety. Sometimes when the cultivar shows broad phenotypic diversity René just select very few plants in the first year (e.g. 1 out of 1000, in sum only 16 plants for seed production). In the next year he grows these 16 lines separately and select the best lines and than the best plants in these lines.

The evening program started with an lecture with Véronique Chable, researcher at the French National Institute of Agronomic Research (INRA). For many years Véronique has been involved in projects financed by the European Commission (Farm Seed Opportunities > Solibam > Diversifood). With her rich experiences in that field she gave an interesting overview of participatory plant breeding initiatives in Brittany and in other parts of France and Europe. After the presentation the evening ended in cosy atmosphere with galettes, crêpes, wine and cider.

### **Sunday, March 15<sup>th</sup>**

On the second day of the workshop we visited another farm of a member of Kaol Kozh. Erwan Rousseau grows a remarkable diversity of vegetables. For a closed nutrient cycle he also feeds cattle on his farm and uses the manure to fertilize the plants.

In the afternoon we discussed different topics regarding seeds and biodiversity. The first subject was protoplast fusion. This method is used to transfer genetic male sterility (CMS) to other species. For example CMS of a radish variety is used for hybrid seed production of *Brassica oleracea* and a CMS-system coming from sunflower is utilized in chicory. For the organic sector protoplast fusion isn't an acceptable breeding method, because it's a kind of genetic engineering that doesn't consider natural barriers between different species. So Bio

Breizh and their partners demand transparency about which varieties are produced with CMS-systems. Furthermore they want to support independent organic breeding initiatives to ensure seed sovereignty for the future.

Another issue was the pink onion variety which is sold under the name 'Oignon de Roscoff'. There is an ambivalent legal situation: On the one hand the European Union promote and protect names of traditional agricultural products (PDO = protected designation of origin, PGI = protected geographical indication, TSG = traditional specialities guaranteed). But on the other hand there is a restrictive seed law that prohibits seed multiplication of these traditional varieties, if they aren't registered. But in many cases such landraces don't meet the DUS criterias and so can not be approved for the formal seed market.

The last topic was the labelling of "farmer seeds". This could be a good way to communicate the efforts for seed sovereignty to the consumers. But what actually are "farmer seeds"? In Spain there is already an initiative to label special vegetables with "100 % local variety". In France there are efforts to establish a kind of charges on products grown from hybrids. This money should be used to support participatory plant breeding for the long term.