

EWRS WORKING GROUP ON INVASIVE PLANTS
Report of the inaugural meeting
Changins (CH), 6th February 2006

by Christian Bohren, Invasive Plants Working Group leader;
christian.bohren@rac.admin.ch

The inaugural meeting gathered specialists and professionals from very diverse backgrounds. 23 participants, whereof 9 EWRS members, from 17 different institutions of 6 European countries met for one day at the Swiss Agricultural Research Station of Changins. We welcomed specialists from various professions like information, biology, meteorology, environmental, biological and agricultural research. A large and fruitful discussion was generated.

As an example aiming at proposing an introduction to the discussion, Christian Bohren presented the situation in Switzerland with *Ambrosia artemisiifolia* and the concerted action developed recently to limit its spreading. The necessity to build bridges between different disciplines and professions to best manage such species was emphasised.

A short discussion about the term “invasive plant” revealed the different approaches (agronomic, biological, environmental, health and economic) possible to apprehend the issue. A global definition of this term has been proposed for the WG: *plants, exotic to Europe e.g. Ambrosia artemisiifolia and not exotic to Europe e.g. Rhododendron pontium, those establishment and spreading damages crop yields and/or threatens native biodiversity*. Participants agreed, that the issues raised by invasive plants constitute a scientific and political challenge that must be addressed by concerted actions.

In order to give a framework for the wide discussion, a global formulation of a mission for the WG was proposed and discussed. The following formulation was unanimously retained:

Mission

The EWRS Working Group on Invasive Plants will develop an international and interdisciplinary platform dedicated to monitor, study, warn and advise on the management of invasive plant species in Europe. This mission will be achieved through the integration of existing and/or execution of especially designed research taking into account agronomic, environmental, health and economic aspects of plant invasion.

At this stage, some topics have been discussed to develop the activities and concerted actions of the WG.

Existing actions and uniqueness of a EWRS-WG

Several academic teams at universities, research stations and institutes already study invasive plants and/or the biological and ecological aspects of invasion. Moreover, numerous groups and institutions already deal with invasive plant species at regional, national and international levels (IUCN, EPPO, SKEW etc.) by establishing lists of invasive plants, sometimes with specific fact- or data sheets, recommendations or control measures. Also, databases gathering information on experts working on invasive species are presently developed (e.g. DAISIE). This

context raises the question of the justification of developing, in the frame of the EWRS, a new working group dealing with these species.

One unique point of this WG could be that it would facilitate the transfer of knowledge, experiences and know-how, developed by weed scientists in agricultural systems, in order to contribute to solve the issues raised in other areas, particularly environmental weeds. Conversely, experience gained by professionals dealing with environmental weeds, for instance in the biological, ecological and phyto-sociological aspects of plant invasion, can be valuable for agronomists.

An other uniqueness of the WG could be the development of projects on species or in special habitats. To promote exchanges in the working group, ring trials could be established. Several possibilities were discussed.

At this stage, four topics have been proposed and retained to develop the activities and concerted action of the WG.

Ambroisa artemisiifolia

Ragweed was the most frequently cited species during all the discussions. The species clearly match all the criteria defined in the mission of the WG as its spreading raises important agronomic, environmental, health and economic issues. Exchanging information and carrying out common experiments could contribute to better management of this plant in infested areas and prevent its spread in other places. Evolution, public health, economy, management control, and information were mentioned as important fields of activity.

Set-asides, ecological surfaces and semi-natural habitats

With the “extensification” of agricultural practices in several places in Europe, new types of areas are emerging in the agricultural landscape (set-asides with the problem of *Cirsium*). Moreover, management of semi-natural habitats such as pastures are also evolving. These new practices can foster invasive species (e.g. *Solidago sp.*, *Senecio sp.*). A species monitoring could be helpful.

Woody invasive plants

Several of the most invasive and threatening plants are woody species. Management options and management technologies were mentioned as important topics to work on.

Further priorities were identified which might form foci for interested parties who were not able to attend:

- a) Knowledge transfer outside intensive cropping (agronomic toolkit). The following terms were discussed: wet lands, still waters, river boards, road sides, parasitic weeds.
- b) Early detection of plant invaders. As possible fields of activity the introduction pathways (seeds, supermarkets, golf courses) and the possibilities to push legal basis for control of plant invaders were discussed as points of interest.

ISIW & PI: International Symposium on Intractable Weeds and Plant Invaders

Luis Silva presented the Symposium that will take place 17-21 July 2006 in Ponta Delgada in the Azores (Portugal). This Symposium aims at gathering researchers from the fields of weed biology and plant invasions in the same meeting in order to

promote the exchange of knowledge between these two complementary fields. Luis Silva presented the tentative program of the Symposium; he is looking for session- and workshop organizers, and also candidates to join the scientific committee. Several members of the group expressed spontaneously their intention to participate to the Symposium. It was decided that Luis Silva organises in close collaboration with Christian Bohren one or two sessions on invasive plants.

The WG decided to organize its next meeting during the Symposium.

Contact for WG on Invasive Plants

Everybody interested is invited to participate. For more information please contact the coordinator:

Christian Bohren

Coordinator of EWRS - WG on Invasive Plants

Swiss Agricultural Research Station

Agroscope Changins-Wädenswil (ACW)

P.O. Box 1012

CH - 1260 Nyon 1, Switzerland

mailto : christian.bohren@rac.admin.ch

www.racchangins.ch

Telephone +41 22 363 44 25

Fax +41 22 363 43 94