

What is organic heterogeneous material (OHM) and how can it be notified?



Figure: The variability of EPO durum spikes

OBJECTIVE

Climate changes threaten crop production year by year, as multiple abiotic and biotic stresses affect plants simultaneously and more frequently. Moreover, the current system for regulating newly developed plant varieties is designed for uniform varieties (i.e., homogeneous plant materials) which hinders the diversification of agricultural crop production. And yet genetic and crop diversity are key elements to the resilience of systems to climatic hazards. Beside this, the breeding process itself is a time- and resource-intensive and costly process, just like the registration of the new varieties.

RESULT

One way of solving this is to use organic heterogeneous materials (OHM), which are described as a group of plants of a species that share common phenotypic characteristics but also have a high degree of genetic and phenotypic diversity (heterogeneity), dynamic evolution and adaptation to certain conditions to which DUS (distinctness, uniformity and stability) protocols are not applicable according to the (EU) Organic Regulation 2018/848. The OHM is neither a variety nor a mixture of varieties and is, therefore, not an object of the variety register but can be notified in a simpler procedure.

As a new possibility offered by the organic regulation, (organic) farmers are not yet properly informed about OHM and their notification procedure, which hinders the uptake and development of this type of cultivar. It is important to promote the OHM simplified notification procedure to the breeders, farmers, and seed producers, which will enable their marketing, foster agrobiodiversity, and provide farmers with a valuable tool to tackle the challenges of climate change. The notification of OHM is a much faster, simpler and cheaper procedure than that of the variety registration

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following information must be provided to the relevant competent authority of each Member State:

- contact details of the applicant;
- the species and denomination of the organic heterogeneous material;
- description of the parental material used for breeding, the breeding methods, process, description of the main agronomic and phenotypic properties, as well as the results of the available tests (if any), and the country of cultivation;
- the applicant's declaration that the information in points a), b) and c) are true; and
- a representative sample must also be provided.

The application must be sent by a registered letter with receipt of delivery, or via another communication channel accepted by the competent authorities – with official confirmation of delivery.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- OHM webinars - Presentations on the YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLccjPZqoqxg7RP5rKz5RbvPCT_kniDxerG
- Organic Heterogeneous Material: new marketing regime for diversified seed populations (by Seeds4All and Artemisia AIBSL) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BDkomih6oWY>
- Participatory breeding in the XXI. Century (English and Hungarian). EN version: <https://biokutatas.hu/upload/inline/2022%20reszveteli%20nemesites%20en%20v4.pdf>; HU version: <https://biokutatas.hu/hu/webshop/item/123/reszveteli-nemesites-a-xxi-szazadban>
- OHM - A new marketing regime for diversified seed populations https://opensourceeds.org/sites/default/files/bilder/BLOG/OHM_LLD_Boklet_S4A.pdf

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