



## Media release

# Participatory research – an efficient tool to empower farmers and foster innovation

**(Frick/Zurich, September 2, 2014) Participatory agricultural research has emerged as an internationally acknowledged method to integrate farmers experience and skills into the innovation process. A symposium in Zurich with experts and project partners of Switzerland's Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL) has emphasised that the approach should include all stakeholders and must always keep the markets in mind in order to produce effective and sustainable results.**

Over 70 experts and project partners took part in the symposium «Participatory Research to foster Innovation in Agriculture» at ETH Zürich a few days ago. The event was organized by FiBL and hosted at ETH by the Zurich-Basel Plant Science Center.

The main conclusions from the discussion were, that participatory research not only has to focus on the farmers and researchers, but at the same time on all other stakeholders of the value chain, including marketing and consumers.

Dutch professor Edith Lammers van Bueren, one of the keynote speakers, explained the challenge of participatory plant breeding in Europe and especially in her home country. She described the successful example of potato breeding in the Netherlands using a participatory approach. When the researchers realised that the joy about the breeding success might get overshadowed by the fact that the newly bred potato variety had white flesh, something that was not accepted by consumers. So in order to sell the new variety, the breeders had to promote it with improved marketing first.

Dr. Christian Pohl from ETH Zurich presented different methods of participatory research that allow to find solutions for the complex questions we encounter in daily life.

All speakers praised participatory research as crucial for the future of sustainable agriculture, giving evidences from their actual experiences. FiBL director Urs Niggli mentioned the example of rediscovered plant based medication for veterinary purposes in

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Das FiBL hat Standorte in der Schweiz, Deutschland und Österreich  
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Switzerland – old knowledge that was unearthed through over hundred interviews that the researchers made with mostly elderly farmers.

Davide Neri, a professor and the director of the experimental farm at Università Politecnica delle Marche in Italy enthusiastically presented a number of case studies of his institute working in a participatory way with olive farmers in Italy, Egypt and Palestine approaching different markets. He identified some constraints for participatory research, for example the limited possibilities for women to take over responsibility in Egypt due to their social status. Neri said that the integration of women is crucial for the success of participatory research. Prof. Shreekant S. Patil from the University of Agricultural Sciences in Dharwad, India highlighted the importance of seed sovereignty of farmers. He illustrated the difficult situations of organic cotton farmers to obtain GMO-free seed and stressed the vertical integration to improve the participatory research process.

After the input by the speakers, the participants took part in a lively discussion. At 10 tables in a World Café they talked about the opportunities and challenges of participatory research and sought agreement on ways how participatory research can best contribute to agricultural development.

The close collaboration between farmers and researchers is one of the key elements accompanying the Farming Systems Comparison in the Tropics (SysCom), implemented by FiBL in Bolivia, India and Kenya and the Green Cotton Participatory Breeding Project in India. 17 project partners from the three above mentioned countries took part in the symposium in Zurich as an integral part of the one week learning event hosted by FiBL.

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### **Additional information online**

SysCom: <http://www.systems-comparison.fibl.org/>

Green Cotton Project: [www.greencotton.org](http://www.greencotton.org)

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