

Media release

Organic research – New insights for young and old alike

Big turnout at Frick: There is much interest in the scientific and practical work conducted by the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture FiBL. This year's Open Day held many attractions for young and old alike, from information to culinary delights to enchanting stories for the youngest visitors.

(Frick, 27 August 2018) Some 4000 visitors took the opportunity to look over the FiBL researchers' shoulders. At the Open Day held on 19 August 2018, experts presented their work to a wide audience at 14 different stalls. Guided tours through the orchards, vineyards and laboratories provided practical tips for farmers.

To dehorn or not to dehorn, that is the question

Approximately 90 percent of all cattle are currently dehorned as a result of economic pressures: horned cows need more space in the stall than dehorned ones. At an information event on the *Hornkuhinitiative* (horned cow initiative), FiBL researcher Anet Spengler and FiBL adviser Claudia Schneider presented arguments in favour of reconsidering the practice of dehorning. "Dehorning is a painful procedure. Horns are living organs that are supplied with blood and grow throughout the animals' lives; the cows use them for communication and body care", said Anet Spengler. "We recommend that the popular initiative be adopted."

Reducing pesticide applications in Switzerland

Current popular initiatives call for a ban of pesticide use in farming. The Swiss Confederation is also pursuing a national action plan on reducing pesticide use. One possible solution would be to entirely convert Switzerland to organic farming, a scenario that was debated in a public discussion panel as part of FiBL's Open Day. "It would be possible to drastically reduce the negative impacts of pesticides on the environment and human health", Lucius Tamm, Head of the Department of Crop Science at FiBL, argued in his presentation. "However, the large-scale implementation of the '*Vision Bioland Schweiz*' – a fully organic Switzerland – would be highly demanding as there would need to be major changes in cultivation techniques, markets and agricultural policy, and yield reductions would be likely."

For 30 years now, FiBL has been developing new organic plant protection strategies, such as plant extracts to combat fungal diseases or beneficial wasps that deposit their eggs in aphids and other crop pests, killing them in the process. "We must now speed

up these developments in order to make organic farming work on all farm holdings”, explains Tamm.

Resistant apples, resilient peas and GM-free cotton

Stalls, guided tours and an information event demonstrated how apples as a permanent crop are under particularly high pressure from damaging fungal and bacterial diseases as well as from insects. In order to find cultivars that can tolerate these pressures, FiBL provides scientific backstopping to private breeders such as the Poma Culta initiative. FiBL also provides support for the further development of crop plants such as peas and lupins which have had less attention from breeders – it does so in cooperation with breeders, farmers, processors and traders.

FiBL is also active overseas, for example in participatory cotton breeding in India where GM-free organic cultivars are bred and selected together with farmers.

The development of innovative breeding strategies of this nature, the worldwide coordination of and support for stakeholders in crop plant breeding, and scientific backstopping for private breeders are among the priorities of FiBL as a centre of excellence and innovation in organic crop plant breeding.

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This media release on the internet

You can find this media release including photographs on the Internet at:

<https://www.fibl.org/en/media.html>.

About FiBL

The Research Institute of Organic Farming FiBL is one of the world's leading research facilities for organic agriculture. FiBL's strengths include interdisciplinary research, joint innovation together with farmers and the food industry as well as rapid knowledge transfer. FiBL employs a total of 280 staff at its different locations.

- Homepage: www.fibl.org
- Video: www.youtube.com/watch?v=U84NrjIORFc