

Workshop 15: Perennial Grains

Convenors: Erik Steen Jensen (SLU, Sweden), Christophe David (ISARA-Lyon, France)

Impulse talks:

- Christophe David (ISARA-Lyon, France) - "Perennial grains: A good alternative for Agroecology?"
- Linda-Maria Mårtensson (SLU, Sweden) - "The ecology of perennial grains: First results with intermediate wheatgrass (Kernza) in sole and intercrop"
- Valentine Debray - " Perspectives on perennial grain crop differ between organic and conventional farmers" (Les Jardins de Lucie, France)
- Olivier Duchêne (ISARA-Lyon, France) - "The Perennial Grain Project"

Perennial crops may provide many potential ecosystem services, among which are the reduction of tillage, C sequestration, the increase in soil quality, in biodiversity, a decrease in fertilizer use, all-year round vegetation cover and a diversified crop rotation. Very little research has been done so far about perennial grains, and several researchers came to share their knowledge about the first research projects developed on the topic. In Sweden, an experiment on Kernza (intermediate wheatgrass) has been run and the first results are promising. Kernza can be used for beer, pancake and bread. The Perennial Grain Project was recently launched in France and Belgium to study on field experiments and assess the growth, the target services and the influence of management practices of perennial grains. An online survey with 407 farmers from France and the US showed that 58% of them were interested in the potential of perennial crops, but 39% needed more information.. The main motivations are to increase the farm's productivity, to enhance the soil health and to decrease the fertilizer use. The perceived limitations are economic (decrease in yields, seed prices) and related to the pest issue. The perceived opportunities are the possibility to value crops and to restore degraded land. Finally, the audience was split into seven groups and all participants could talk about the potential and the relevance of perennial grains. Most participants were positive about perennial cereals as an agroecological practice, but especially to restore and value marginal land rather than to compete with annuals. A lot of research topics for the future were identified.