

GSN Best Practice Competition 2008



Application form

Applicant

Organisation, country	Ministry of Environment and Water, Hungary
Name, surname	Ditta GREGUSS
Headline of best practice initiative	'Let's look around in our neighbourhood!'

Description of best practice initiative

Describe the basis of your best practice initiative (why, what, when, where; budget in EUR).
<p>Our nation-wide initiative was launched on the International Day of Biological Diversity (22 May) in 2007. The title 'Let's look around in our neighbourhood!' refers to the importance of being familiar with our personal environment wherein we are living. This year we wanted to draw people's attention not only to our natural flora and fauna but also to Hungary's agricultural biodiversity. The conservation of our traditional plant varieties and landraces adapted to different environmental, climatic and geographical conditions are of great importance regarding adaptation to climate change. Therefore, the Ministry of Environment and Water together with the Research Center for Agrobotany, which is Hungary's largest agricultural gene bank and also the institute with nation-wide responsibility for the technical coordination of the plant genetic resources collections, launched a student competition titled 'Let's look around in our neighbourhood!'. The task of the applicants was to note down what kind of traditional crop, fruit and vegetable varieties can still be found in the kitchen gardens of their town or their grandparents' village/town. They had to find out what is the traditional/local name of the certain variety, what are the characteristic features of the plant, why people grow/plant that variety or whether there is any specific cultivation method. During the survey students made interviews with the owners and growers of the traditional and local varieties, they took photos of the plant specimens as well as collected and tasted the fruits. All these activities gave them the possibility to learn the real experiences and knowledge of "wise old" people living in the countryside. The experts from the Hungarian Research Center for Agrobotany helped students in determining plant varieties and also in evaluating the applications. The deadline for the competition was St Márton's day (11 November 2007), which is the last day of the agricultural period. On the occasion of the IBD and by the help of the Research Center for Agrobotany, a colourful temporary seed exhibition of traditional Hungarian crops (maize, wheat, lens, beans, oat, rye etc.) was also set up at the Green Gallery of the Ministry of Environment and Water, which was afterwards moved to the Open Air Museum (skanzen) in Szentendre in order to get more publicity. After the careful evaluation of the valuable works, the prize-giving ceremony was organised on 14 February 2008 in the Research Center for Agrobotany. According to traditional wisdom all fruit trees planted on the very day of 14 February will sprout. In addition to valuable prizes for the winners, a whole-day guided tour was organized for the 'gold-medal' teams at the Balaton-Upland National Park on 22 April (Earth Day).</p>

What was the main objective of the initiative and what were the results obtained (please quantify)?
<p>The initiative focused on the importance of agricultural biodiversity, with special regard to the great diversity of traditional fruit, crop and vegetables varieties. The main objective was to make people understand the value of these plants that are important part of our national natural heritage. Therefore, our aim was to help people get to know more about the traditional plant varieties and in this way their local environment, traditions and old people's knowledge. By helping people knowing local varieties, we encouraged them to buy and use these plants, which is essential for their maintenance and conservation.</p>

What type of media did you use (TV, radio, print, electronic)? Why this choice of media?
<p>Press conference was organised on 22 May 2007 when launching the initiative and also at the end of the programme (14 February 2008).</p> <p>The competition was advertised through website, e-newsletters, targeted emails, billboard and newspapers. Articles were published in electronic and printed media (magazines).</p>

Who was the target group?

Students (age: 6-18 years)

What were the main messages?

Raise awareness on the importance of preserving and maintaining agricultural biodiversity, in particular traditional crop, fruit and vegetable varieties.

Who were the partners? Did you involve other institutions/ministries/agencies/NGOs?

Ministry of Environment and Water

Research Center for Agrobotany (provides expertise and materials for the exhibition)

NGO - Ecological Institute for Sustainable Development (provides expertise and posters for the exhibition)

Who financed the activities, amount of finances?

Ministry of Environment and Water (1000 Euro)

Did you experience any specific difficulties during the action that could be learned from?

No particular difficulties were experienced.

Did you receive any feedback after your activities? Did you carry out an evaluation of the results and if yes, what was the outcome?

The participants of the programme have become very enthusiastic about the theme. Many students involved their parents, who came to some events. One of the schools already planted local fruit trees in its garden and some others also asked for seeds and seedlings of traditional varieties.

At the closing event lots of teachers and schools asked whether the initiative will continue in the future. Therefore, we decided to deal with the topic of agro-biodiversity in this year's campaign as well.

Is any follow-up or duplication of this experience foreseen?

On 22 May 2008, the Ministry of Environment and Water launched a fairy tale writing competition without any age restriction called "Still any sky-high bean stalks at your village?". The title refers to a wide known story called 'Jack and the bean stalk'.

Why do you consider that your proposal should be selected as the best practice initiative of the year?

Agro-biodiversity has been declining all over the world and nowadays people use less plant varieties than ever. This project helped to draw people's attention to the value of local plant varieties (they are more tasty, better adapt to local environmental conditions, more resistant to pests etc.), which we may loose if not using them.

The initiative helped people learn about local plant varieties and gain traditional knowledge through studying their local environment and culture. Besides, this knowledge helped to arouse people's demand for using and growing local varieties. The initiative also had real practical effect as one of the schools already planted some local varieties and many others expressed their willingness to do so. This shows the great practical benefit of the project, which we believe should be used as a best practice.

Please feel free to attach any printed material, photos etc.

Send your application to EECN_secretariat@cowi.com by 1 June 2008