



International Workshop in Vienna, 16.4.2008

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## **Main aims and project activities of the EU Network Agricultural Technology**

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### ***Why did we initiate the project?***

On a daily basis, we as works councils and trade unions experience the meaning of internationalisation in companies and in collective bargaining: The companies of our industrial sector have already been co-operating beyond borders for a long time, to open new markets for their products, to achieve financial advantages through outsourcing and dislocation or cheaper suppliers.

We all know the **employers' argument** often put forward in company-wide negotiations that competitors are "cheaper".

This strategy to play employees of one sector off against each other and therefore to increase the pressure on wages and working conditions, was the main reason, why colleagues in the agricultural technology industry in Germany started to organise themselves and to create the **network agricultural technology** already more than 10 years ago.

Today, most of the approximately 30.000 employees of this sector in Germany are represented in the network. Since 1996, it has strongly grown together and has one **simple objective:**

We won't work against each other, but **together**, for example if issues like extending working time or other forms of increased flexibility (e.g. temporary employment) are demanded by employers. Together, we are stronger! And we have a common mission. „Better instead of cheaper“ is important.

For the exchange of experiences and development of common strategies, to co-ordinate our demands and to make them public, the network agricultural technology has achieved a lot of things: More than a dozen of **sector seminars as** a platform for employee representatives to exchange ideas and develop common concepts has been carried out so far. The 17th seminar took place some days ago and was mainly about qualification and further training opportunities for employees.

But there is more than just the organisation of conferences and meetings, which has been supported from our side as IG Metall: Colleagues of the network have developed an impressive **website** with a lot of information about companies and other aspects. This project was only possible because of strong voluntary work.

An important date of the network was the year 2004: At the 10th sector seminar a common declaration was adopted, in which a common strategy of the employees is formulated to collective bargaining politics. This „**Declaration of Münster**“ was an important step and an English translation can be found among the conference documents.

### ***The need for a Europe-wide network***

The network agricultural technology was created in 1996, at a time when the **European Union** did not have 27 member states, but had just going through a small enlargement



round from 12 to 15 member states (Austria, Finland, Sweden becoming EU members in 1995) and the process of the eastern enlargement had just began.

Ever since did the **process of increasing international corporate structures** also determine the agricultural technology industry, more specifically in two different ways:

- German companies established even stronger international cooperation - also enabled through freedom of capital mobility in Europe without borders. Today, not only sales but also production and the added value chain are organised transnational. Today, many German companies have been transformed in "global players". That is why the employees do not only face competition from the German market, but are also benchmarked against competitors in other EU countries.
- At the same time, multinational companies play an increasingly important role within the agricultural technology industry through mergers, acquisition and newly opened branches. For our colleagues working at Kverneland (Norway), John Deere (the USA) or CNH (Italy) a strong influence on management decisions will only be possible, if you co-operate with your colleagues in other countries.

That is why closer cooperation with **colleagues from other countries** already for several years was a logical step for the network. Our meeting today in Vienna is not a coincidence: Co-operation with colleagues in Austria has existed for a long time and has been intensified throughout the last years.

Here, we can benefit from the common language, which might be in other cases the largest barrier for international co-operation and exchange of experience beyond borders.

Nevertheless, this **cooperation is nowadays more important than ever before**:

- The Eastern enlargement of the EU led to a new stage of transnational organised added value chains
- Supplier relations and also the relocation of production sites have contributed to a new dimension for many companies
- China as a new player in the global market economy has added to the pressure on European locations, no matter if "old " or "new" member states

### ***The EU Project***

Everybody knows from your own experience that interest representation and trade union policy can no longer be defined exclusively on a national level - international capital relations also require stronger **internationalisation of our structures of operational and trade union representation**.

Existing **instruments of European interested representation** - i.e. the European Works Councils - are only quite weak instruments in this context: they are mainly limited to a rather symbolic dialogue and exchange of information, and are not suitable for setting up relations between companies of one sector and are only limited to structure of large scale industries.

As a matter of fact, all of you made your own unsatisfactory experiences with Euro Works Councils and their limited coordination functions in regard to employee representation and trade union policy.

We believe that the agricultural technology industry is better organised through the employee network. A good example was provided by the work councils at GM/OPEL. They successfully organised consultation and coordination on a European level for protecting locations and job, with support of the EMB. Undoubtedly, it makes sense for **works councils and trade unions to clearly organise themselves and exchange experiences on a transnational level**, than it is the case today.

The **EMB, due to restricted capacities, can not carry out this task on its own** – we have to get started!

Our **European network project** is a wonderful example for such an approach to organise networks and exchange of experiences beyond borders. This is more important than ever before.

Certainly, we are **entering the unknown land with this project**. Also, the course of the project of 12 months will not be sufficient to reach half of what the colleagues in Germany and Austria have reached within 12 years.

That is why, we should be moderate in regard **what can be achieved within our time-frame and with our restricted financial means**. Particularly important is:

- to get to know each other
- to try to overcome cultural and language barriers
- to acquire knowledge about working conditions and the specific situation in the sector in other European countries
- to learn something about everyday problems and collective bargaining of our colleagues in other countries
- to exchange points of view on trade union work in companies and interest representation and to develop common perspectives

We would like to start this process with our project and this **workshop in Vienna** serves as an important step.

From our **consultation** with colleagues in the countries involved in this project including from those countries, who unfortunately could not join us in Vienna (Finland, Poland), we have learned several things:

- Today companies of the agricultural technology industry in Europe are closely linked through supplier relations, shares and other forms of co-operation.
- Only few European Works Councils have been established so far and apart from that hardly any transnational contacts have been established
- There is an increasing pressure on production sites. Particularly in Eastern European countries the process of liberalisation and opening towards western Europe has led to the closure of traditional companies. Remaining companies are facing further adjustment measures.
- Also colleagues in Eastern Europe have to deal with cost-determined arguments such as „we can produce with lower costs in China or the Ukraine“ .

Following our kick-off meeting in last August/September, we did some preliminary work which is of help in this context:

We began exchanging information on working conditions and main sector data to development requirements for such an exchange.

For the **countries** represented here, the workshop in Vienna will serve as a kind of interim result – until the end of the project, further countries will be added.

For international cooperation, we made the first step and set up a **website of the agricultural technology network** with documents on the background of our project in English, on the network and on the company structures in Germany.

Our objective is to develop a **European map of the agricultural technology industry** in order to provide you with necessary information and background data on locations in other countries.

All of you should contribute to this map and for me it is important that **at the end of today's workshop** we know more about your expectations regarding the European map and our further network activities: How do we deal with the language barrier, which pieces of information are missing in our exchange of information on national sector data and company information? Which topics do we need to work on?

In addition, a **result of the today's workshop** should be to define realistic goals for the remaining course of this project: What do we want to achieve until September? How do we make the best out of the final conference and our financial resources?