

In the past half year, IIRB continued its activities online: Next to study group video conferences, IIRB held its annual seminar on a virtual platform over two afternoons and organised its first online General Assembly. More details are given in the following.

## STUDY GROUP COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES

Video meetings 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2020 and 11<sup>th</sup> May 2021

The group met twice online in the past half year. At the December meeting, the members discussed how farmers can be supported towards a change in the face of virus yellows. Virus yellows significantly impacted crops in several European countries in 2020. Intensified communication as well as peer learning could enhance farmer's knowledge about virus yellows. Communication and knowledge transfer will become more important. Communication will have to be more segmented, more precise and multi-channel to address farmer's needs. While traditional learning implies a top-down information transfer, peer learning engages those involved to exchange their own experiences and strengthens the spirit of mutual aid and collaboration. It increases the independence of farmers and contributes to building up socio-motivational relationships.

At the May meeting the group discussed how the pandemic changed the communication with growers as well as within organisations. The need to meet virtually has facilitated meetings in some areas. Despite the advantages of face-to-face meetings, the digitisation of activities can be expected to be maintained after the pandemic.

## STUDY GROUP SEED QUALITY AND TESTING

Video meeting 21<sup>st</sup> January 2021

On initiative of the group, a questionnaire on the use of fungicide treatment for sugar beet seed germination testing had been issued and sent to the members of the group as well as to the ISTA Germination Committee. The aim was to evaluate the current laboratory practices of using fungicide seed treatments prior to germination testing. Results were discussed: out of 34 labs, 40% used fungicide treatment. Most wished to maintain the option of using fungicide, although several alternatives were already used or tested.

## PROJECT GROUP NEONICS AND VIRUS YELLOWS

2021 activities; video meeting June 2021

The common trials of the project group to develop testing methods for virus resistance/tolerance are ongoing. The trials were set up in cooperation with the IIRB Genetics and Breeding study group. The aim is to develop a simplified method for resistance/ tolerance testing of sugar beet towards yellowing viruses.

The group also met online in June with representatives of the company Corteva to get information on their product Sulfoxaflor, which is one of the few registered products against aphids in sugar beet in some European countries.

## IIRB SEMINAR 'ADVANCING WEED CONTROL IN SUGAR BEET WITH SENSORS AND FIELD ROBOTICS'

4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> May 2021

The options for sensor- and robot-assisted weed control have increased significantly in the past years. The 2021 IIRB Seminar focussed on this development and presented the state of the art of this technology section.

Planned as an in-person event, the seminar was instead held fully virtually on two half days on an event platform. In a series of talks, speakers presented an overview on the use of sensors and robots in agriculture, and a range of technical approaches. The second session gave a clear view on practical applications and the acceptance of the technology among farmers. The platform allowed live discussions after the talks and provided networking opportunities for participants via chats and video-communication.



Sensor data taken in the field (Picture: IfZ/Paulus)



The seminar was complemented with a virtual exhibition representing six companies and two institute's projects. The exhibitor's contact persons were available for direct discussions on the seminar platform.

The newest approaches in autonomously navigating agricultural robots and plant recognition systems were presented by the companies Agriointelli, ecoRobotix, FarmDroid, Farming Revolution, Strube and xarvio/Bosch. They can be used both in mechanical and chemical precision weeding.

The German institute IfZ presented the project FarmerSpace, a collaboration with the University of Göttingen, Fraunhofer and LWK Niedersachsen. FarmerSpace aims to evaluate digital tools for weed and disease detection in wheat and sugar beet, to improve decision-making processes on plant protection measures, and to transfer knowledge into academic teaching and training.

The French institute ITB informed on their virtual exhibition Dés herb'Avenir. This is normally a live event, presenting state of the art weed control machinery in the field. The content was now presented virtually in an educational film.

All exhibitor information is available on the IIRB web site.

## 56<sup>TH</sup> GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE IIRB

17<sup>th</sup> June 2021

The new Belgian Code for Associations and Societies now requires that international non-profit associations organise annual (and not only biennial) General Assemblies.

The 56<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of IIRB was the first to be held virtually as a Zoom Webinar. An additional electronic governance software allowed easy online voting and validly documented the whole meeting. It is an excellent tool allowing to comply to the legal requirements of an international association like IIRB. It can be used in the future in case it should not always be possible to link annual General Assemblies to larger IIRB events.

## NEW PROJECT GROUP SOIL PESTS

Kick-off meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> September 2021

A new project group 'Soil Pests' was initiated by IIRB. The aim of this group is to share knowledge on the control of different soil pests and to plan joint field trials.

These will consider alternative insecticides, but also other crop measures to control soil pests like *Atomaria*, wireworms, millipedes, *Onychiurus*, etc. The options for joint field trials will be discussed; results of these trials will be presented at future IIRB congresses.

Sugar beet farmers in Europe nowadays depend on the use of tefluthrin to protect their sugar beets against soil pests.

While this active substance is approved until 31/12/2024, an evaluation for its reregistration still has to take place. It should be avoided that soil pest control depends on only one active substance, therefore proactive research and joint trials are needed as a basis for political decision making.



Soil pests – new control approaches are needed (Pictures: IRS)

## 78<sup>TH</sup> IIRB CONGRESS

The next IIRB Congress will be held 21<sup>st</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2022 in Mons, Belgium. Topical issues in sugar beet cultivation will be presented during the first two days in around 25 oral and 100 poster contributions. The Congress will be an excellent platform for networking and scientific exchange, both during congress sessions and at diverse get-together events. Next to the two days of scientific presentations, an excursion will be organised on 23<sup>rd</sup> June that will enable participants to experience topical Belgian agricultural research.

## CALL FOR PAPERS

For the technical congress sessions on 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> June, the IIRB welcomes scientifically-based contributions from all areas of sugar beet growing, focusing on innovative approaches, products, technologies, and methodologies.

**Presentation proposals are very welcome. Please hand them in online by 15/9/2021 ([www.iirb.org](http://www.iirb.org)).**

Based on the returned proposals, the IIRB Scientific Advisory Committee will put together the congress programme at its next meeting. You will receive the invitation and registration information in November 2021. We look forward to meeting you again in person in Mons next year.

## IIRB MEETINGS AGENDA

SG Weed Control	June 1 <sup>st</sup> 2021 – postponed
PG Soil Pests	Sept. 7 <sup>th</sup> , 2021, video conference
SG Pests & Diseases	Sept. 28 <sup>th</sup> and Oct. 1 <sup>st</sup> , 2021, video conferences
SG Genetics & Breeding	October, date to be confirmed
Joint AC/SAC meeting	Nov. 3 <sup>rd</sup> , 2021, Brussels
SG Communication Techniques	Nov. 23 <sup>rd</sup> , 2021 video conference
78 <sup>th</sup> IIRB Congress	21 <sup>st</sup> -23 <sup>rd</sup> June 2022

