

PRESS RELEASE

SEKEM and Organic Pioneers Drive Biodiversity Management

Nuremberg, June 15 - 16, 2010. Food security and poverty, climate change and water scarcity, as well as environmental degradation including dramatic biodiversity loss are among the most critical challenges we face in the 21st century. Global agricultural production must obviously be regarded as a major link between all of these issues – and a more sustainable agricultural paradigm is the only system able to provide the solutions we will need to survive in dignity on a planet with more than seven billion people.

The SEKEM Group of companies form an integrated value chain based on biodynamic agricultural farming on former desert land – therefore, its commercial success is essentially based on the productive and diverse agro-ecosystem it developed in more than three decades of organic cultivation.

Biodiversity in agricultural production is not only an issue of the habitats and ecosystems created on farm lands, but also of the diversity of cultivated varieties within single crop types. Here, retail and consumer expectations on shape, size, taste and available varieties of agricultural products are a dangerously limiting factor, threatening extinction of thousands of valuable crop varieties. All parts of the market therefore need to take up their responsibility to protect and develop global biodiversity.

Biodiversity has always been the best insurance against agricultural productivity risks and today, its strategic value for long-term business success has finally become a hot topic of international discussion across all sectors. However, a lot of work remains to be done on the comprehensive integration of biodiversity-related impacts, efforts and opportunities into corporate sustainability management frameworks. SEKEM and the International Association for Partnership in Ecology and Trade (IAP), a group of companies from the organic movement, took the lead and developed a comprehensive sustainability assessment tool. Its performance indicators are based on the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), and include quantitative as well as qualitative specifications. Since 2008, with this tool the SEKEM Group has integrated a range of indicators related to plant and animal diversity into its strategic management framework and its public annual reporting.

In April 2010, the IAP companies have launched an initiative for enhancing organic certification standards, urging the need to integrate a broad range of additional environmental, social and cultural aspects of sustainable development such as biodiversity and soil stewardship, water and energy efficiency, as well as employee relations and community development.

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SEKEM – A Community for Sustainable Development

Sekem was founded 1977 by Dr. Ibrahim Abouleish, some 60km in the north east of Cairo. With the practices of bio-dynamic agriculture the former desert was turned into fertile soils. Today, the eight companies of the SEKEM Group employ about 1,500 people, cultivating and processing biodynamic raw material and producing healthy and environmentally sound food products, textiles and phyto-pharmaceuticals. Yet, the SEKEM vision of a sustainable community contains much more. Today a hospital offers medical services for employees and reaches 30,000 people in surrounding rural communities. Schools, a training center and a research academy provide education and human development. Adult learning, social and cultural activities are an integral part of SEKEM to develop social forms which reflect human dignity and to strive towards higher ideals. The Heliopolis University for Sustainable Development is currently established to provide students with holistic solutions for the future. In 2003 the SEKEM Initiative was honored with the Alternative Nobel Prize for its business model which integrates social and cultural development, and with the "Outstanding Social Entrepreneur" award by the Schwab Foundation. More information on www.sekem.com

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