

A brief review in INEC history 1970 -1995

H.P. Laurent

Presented at the INEC General Assembly on 12 May 1995, Limassol

As you all know, we are celebrating this year the 25th anniversary of INEC, bearing in mind that the legal registration took place on 4 February 1972 in Brussels. Yet, we felt it would be the appropriate time for a review of the major event, particularly because most of you joined INEC as active member at a later time.

Up to 1970, the LBG business was internationally run in a relatively unorganised way. No quality standards or specifications, nor ways for understanding of the common problems like crop information, existed. At that time, each party bought its raw material where it had an opportunity, irrespective as to whether markets of other LBG manufacturers were upset. Therefore, 14 LBG manufacturers met for the first time on 19 February 1970 in Barcelona and agreed to defend primarily the common interests of the LBG business, in order to survive in the market.

As a first step, it was agreed that each LBG manufacturer buys only in his domestic market. Morocco, Algeria, Cyprus, Turkey were classified as "international markets", in which all parties could buy kernels at that time.

On 2-3 July 1970 the foundation meeting for INEC (Institut Europeen des Industries de la Gomme de Caroube) took place in Lagonissi, Athens, the objective being, to give LBG producers a legal identity.

Main items discussed were:

- Classification of LBG into several quality grades
- Establish a formula for the approximate cost for LBG
- Standard packaging
- Assessment of crop size
- Country wise reduction of LBG production in view of a small crop

At that time, kernels were bought at around EsP 15-17/kg, respectively USD 170 - 195 / ton. High graded LBG reached \$ 1000/ton and industrial LBG approx. \$ 600/ton.

The second meeting took place already on 4 September 1970 in Torremolinos where the Draft Statutes of the association have been revised and subsequently distributed to members in November 1970.

On 5 March 1971, a very important meeting took place. Besides administrative matters, the goal was set to obtain an ADI, not yet specified for LBG. The reason being, that so far, LBG as food additive could only be defended due to its long history of use, a criterion which might have become obsolete in the future.

At the General Assembly on 20 November 1975, again in Athens, an amount of \$ 75'000 was approved for feeding (toxicological) tests and the contract given to Bio Test Lab, USA, in the following year. The inflow of funds was not as fast as the approval of the credit. Anyhow, Bio Test started with experiments in February 1977.

It was, therefore a great relief, when Prof. Neukom, our chairman of the Technical Committee at that time, reported 8 May 1981 that experts were satisfied with the results of our toxicity studies and the ADI not specified for LBG is no longer temporary but permanent. Hence, one of INEC's main tasks has successfully been completed and the LBG obtained E 410.

Later on, new subjects were brought up, like better use of carob kibbles, carob sugar, toasted carob powder etc.

An INEC Manual was created to inform about LBG. A first symposium was organised in October 1982 in Taormina/Sicily in order to sensibilise government bodies, cooperatives etc. to include carob trees in agricultural programs, with the aim, to improve the supply on long-term basis.

Early in 1984, the LBG industry was alarmed by a frost in Spain which led to a bad crop in the same year. Raw material and LBG prices continuously increased through to mid 1986 and LBG had reached for the first time prices of above \$ 12.--/kg equal to about CHF 20.--/kg. As a result, all users of LBG reduced their share which led to a substantial worldwide reduction in volume. As a consequence, there were for many years always enough kernels available for the industry and this at constant price erosion.

Despite those dull times, a second Symposium was held at the in September 1987 in Valencia for the same purpose as in Sicily before. Spanish cooperatives applied for an EU subsidy for carob which was granted and is still in force. Unfortunately, this did not sufficiently attract farmers to plant new trees.

A very proud project has been launched very discreetly some 8 years ago by AIDA in Portugal. Under the direction of Brito de Carvalho, a very detailed botanical and cultivation study of carob trees was made. The results were presented to us at the GA 1993 in Lisbon. Under the EUREKA program, the results of all studies could be transformed into reality and thousands of young trees have been planted in the Algarve, replacing the very old carob trees. Also a lot of know-how has been collected for making a proper crop estimate. All of us would have had very much appreciated, had this also existed for other important carob producing areas, like Spain and Italy. Unfortunately, Brito de Carvalho, whom we wanted to contact last December in this respect, suddenly passed away mid December 1994.

The current LBG crisis demonstrates the importance for having valid crop estimates but also a study for potential new plantings in all carob producing areas.

In recent years it has been considered to expand the organisation to producers in Non-European countries. INEC Statutes however clearly defined that this is not possible. At the General Assembly 2002, the decision was taken to revise the Statutes in order to admit to INEC also members from outside of Europe. At the same time also the proposal came up, to move the legal domicile of INEC to Zurich, Switzerland.

The new Organisation has been renamed to *INEC Association of Producers of Carob Bean Gum* and registered on November 2003 in Zurich Switzerland.

INEC (Belgium) has been dissolved at the General Assembly 2004.