

## 13 ORGANIZATIONS SIGN HISTORIC AGREEMENT TO FIGHT ILLEGAL SEED PRACTICES

*Rotterdam, the Netherlands* – The International Seed Federation (ISF) joined forces with 12 organizations representing and defending the interests of plant breeders worldwide to collaborate in the fight against illegal seed practices (ISP) through a historic memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed today at the ISF World Seed Congress 2024.

The organizations participating are ISF, the African Seed Trade Association (AFSTA), the Asia and Pacific Seed Alliance (APSA), Euroseeds, the Seed Association of the Americas (SAA), the Anti-Infringement Bureau for Intellectual Property Rights on Plant Material (AIB), the Breeders Trust, CIOPORA (International Community of Breeders of Asexually Reproduced Horticultural Plants), CropLife International, Gestión de Licencias Vegetales (GESLIVE), SICASOV, Seed Innovation Protection Alliance (SIPA), and Seeds Innovation and Protection Initiative (SIPI).


With this MoU, the organizations aim to increase awareness about and implement Legal Seed and Plant Practices worldwide. These practices promote value creation in the agricultural and horticultural sectors and foster innovation for farmers and growers. Such innovation is crucial to the development of plant varieties that meet the current and future needs of plant breeders, including adaptation to the impacts of climate change and resistance to different pests and diseases.

“It is time that we act together to raise awareness about not only the magnitude but also the serious consequences that illegal activities in seeds may have not only economically to seed companies and farmers but also to consumers,” said Marco van Leeuwen, President of ISF.

Michael Keller, Secretary General of ISF shared: “The MoU was signed here today at our centennial congress to send a clear message: events like the ISF World Seed Congress must not become a platform for infringers to trade in illegal seeds. In fact, ISF has put in place a procedure to exclude entities and individuals who are proven to commit illegal seed practices from future congresses.”

### **ISP as “Illicit Trade in Food and Food Fraud”**

Illegal seed practices may cover activities including counterfeit seeds, fraudulent labelling, intellectual property infringements, regulatory offences, trademark infringements, and thefts of proprietary material.



Although there is no hard data about the prevalence of illegal seed practices around the world, according to a recent survey conducted by ISF, they are widespread in many countries, affecting many crops, value chain actors and even consumers. Depending on the crops and geographies, illegal seeds may account for up to 50% of the market and have devastating consequences for farmers, who may face severe crop failures and economic losses. As a whole, these activities threaten the integrity of the seed sector and put farmers' livelihoods, food production, and food security at risk.

As part of awareness-raising efforts, ISF has written a chapter on the implications of illegal seed practices in a publication of the World Trade Organization (WTO) entitled "Illicit Trade in Food and Food Fraud," which was released today.

In this publication, WTO's Doaa Abdel-Motaal, Senior Counsellor, WTO Agriculture and Commodities Division, stated: "Illicit trade and fraud in the agri-food sector has a wide range of impacts on various stakeholders, including consumers, farmers, agri-businesses, regulators and other operators within the food industry. Although the global cost of fraud to the food industry is difficult to determine given the clandestine nature of the activity, annual estimates are in the range of US\$ 30-50 billion (which does not include losses associated with illicit trade in alcoholic beverages)."

"We must remember that plant breeders are those who, thanks to research in plant improvement, work every day to provide solutions from the farmer to the consumer. We develop new varieties to, for example, fight climate change, produce more with fewer resources, or reduce food waste," said Antonio Villaroel, Managing Director of Gestión de Licencias Vegetales (GESLIVE).

"We are clear that together we can work harder and better, and reach more people with our messages, which support the fight against illegal seed practices and ensure that the work we do every day is valued. We cannot forget that the seed is the first link in the value chain," said Mary Ann Sayoc, President of the Seeds Innovation and Protection Initiative (SIPI).

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## About ISF

ISF is the voice of the global seed industry. It has represented the interests of its members since 1924, and represents 96% of the international seed trade today. With a global reach extending to members around the world and official observer status in intergovernmental and international organizations, ISF is uniquely positioned to assist in the development of government policy and business strategy.

[www.worldseed.org](http://www.worldseed.org)



**About AFSTA:** The [African Seed Trade Association \(AFSTA\)](#) is a not-for-profit membership association formed in 2000 to champion interests of private seed companies in Africa. It is registered in Kenya as an International Organization. Currently, the Association has about 100 members comprising of seed companies, National Seed Trade Associations, and associate members. Additionally, AFSTA is engaged in international discussions on seed movement at the ISF, OECD, UPOV as well as FAO level. The main activities of AFSTA is to create the best environment for trade and innovation in quality seed for the benefit of members and African farmers.

**About APSA:** [The Asia and Pacific Seed Alliance \(APSA\)](#) is a regional seed association comprised of around 500 seed companies, representing 50+ countries within and outside the Asia-Pacific region. Operating in a dynamic and diverse seed market, the majority of APSA's members are medium and small-sized seed enterprises, while fifty (50%) of its company members are integrated seed companies, whose operations include research and development facilities, seed production, seed processing, sales, and marketing. APSA's mission is to support sustainable agriculture through the production and trade of quality seeds for the world.


**About Euroseeds:** [Euroseeds](#) is the voice of the European seed sector. We therefore represent the interests of those active in research, breeding, production and marketing of seeds of agricultural, horticultural and ornamental plant species. Today, Euroseeds, with more than 30 national member associations from EU Member States and beyond, represents several thousand seed businesses, as well as more than 70 direct company members, including from seed-related industries.

**About SAA:** [The Seed Association of the Americas \(SAA\)](#) is a non-governmental organization that fully represents the interests of the seed industry within the Americas. The main purposes of the SAA are to promote and support development, trade, and free movement of seed within the continent and advocate seed industry legislation and regulation issues. SAA members are countries from the Americas (North-Central-South), represented through their national seed associations, seed related companies, national research institutes and universities as well.

**About AIB:** The [AIB](#) is the Anti-Infringement Bureau for IP Rights on Plant Material, an international not-for-profit association created by integrated vegetable seed companies to prevent and fight illegal seed practices across the value chain. The AIB has expertise in processing global infringement data, managing sophisticated investigations and coordinating enforcement actions against companies suspected of infringing IP rights or seed law regulations.

**About Breeders Trust:** [Breeders Trust](#) is an organisation of 12 seed potato breeding companies that started in 2008. In 2012, 10 grass seed companies joined Breeders Trust. The mission of Breeders Trust is to contribute to the fair production, processing, and trading of plant propagation material (seed potatoes/grasses) on a level playing field for everyone. Without PBR protection, there is no innovation, and without innovation, there is no food security!

**About CIOPORA:** [CIOPORA](#) is a community of breeders of asexually reproduced horticultural plants. It is globally accepted as an independent non-profit and non-governmental organization seeking to establish effective IP protection systems for horticulture. CIOPORA enjoys the observer status at the Community Plant Variety Office (CPVO) and the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV).



**About CropLife International:** As a global voice and leading advocate for the plant science industry, [CropLife International](#) champions innovative technologies that help farmers grow more food on less land sustainably. The association represents six of the world's leading multinational R&D companies in the plant science sector by protecting intellectual property to foster a culture of innovation, advocating for trade and regulatory policies that facilitate access to new technologies, and ensuring the responsible and effective use of plant science innovations.

**About GESLIVE/ANOVE:** The Spanish Plant Breeders Association (ANOVE) is the association that brings together companies and public centers dedicated to generating added value in the agri-food sector through research, development and exploitation of new plant varieties. ([www.anove.es](http://www.anove.es) / [www.geslive.com](http://www.geslive.com))

**About SICASOV:** [SICASOV](#) is a French-based cooperative company, managing intellectual property rights held by 375 plant breeders in 38 countries. For this purpose, SICASOV issues more than 8500 operating licence agreements – encompassing more than 5000 varieties – to 1150 producers who market their seed or plants. In return, SICASOV collects royalties, redistributes these to the breeders and monitors the proper use of the rights granted. SICASOV also manages and defends biotechnological inventions, processes or brands. In cases of infringement, the company can also take legal action on behalf of the rights holders.

**About SIPA:** [SIPA](#) is dedicated to promoting the value of seed innovations and the protection, prevention and enforcement of seed intellectual property rights that benefit growers, industry associates, consumers and the agricultural community.

**About SIPI:** Seed Innovation and Protection Initiative (SIPI) is a Singapore-based Asian association representing companies conducting their business in the vegetable seed industry in the Asia and Pacific Region (APAC). Our members are integrated vegetable seed companies located inside and outside the APAC region who commit to supporting sustainable horticulture through innovation in vegetable breeding and seed production. The mission of SIPI is to develop a regional network for the fight against and prevention of illegal seed practices (including IP infringement) in the APAC region by raising awareness about the importance of Intellectual Property (IP) rights among different stakeholders.