



ISF Congress: seed is life

Focusing on sustainability, the world around the seed business met in France for the ISF annual congress in early June. Through the motto “Seed is life”, the event attracted more than 1,700 participants to the city of Nice to foster and facilitate negotiations between public and private companies interested in importing and exporting a wide range of plant materials, ranging from large crops to forage, legume and ornamental species.

In addition, discussion panels were designed to address issues related to Plant Protection, Seed Technology, Plant Regulation and Seed enhancement (including innovation, sustainability and intellectual property) committees. Sections of discussion on international trade in forage species, legumes, ornamental and large crops were also conducted during the event.

During his opening speech, ISF President Eduardo Fitó emphasized the great challenge of the seed sector in continuing the development of cultivars in a sustainable way in order to absorb the significant world demand of 60% more food, which will need to address approximately 9.8 billion people in 2050. According to Michael Keller, ISF General Secretary, the seed chain has a crucial role to play in helping to achieve zero UN hunger targets (program launched in 2015), as there is no sustainability without well-established markets, mainly the seed one which forms the basis of any agricultural environment. For this reason, illegal practices involving the seed trade need to be increasingly inhibited by the governments and responsible entities of each country.

In addressing sustainability within plant breeding of the modern era, Michael Gumina, global CEO of RiceTec, mentioned that the average temperature of various locations on the planet may be 1°C to 2.5°C higher by 2030, where manpower efficiency tends to be less efficient, requiring improved mechanization and plant breeding to successfully anticipate rapid climate change and its consequent production challenges.

“With higher levels of CO₂ present in the atmosphere, plant productivity suffers from serious risks because CO₂ competes with N within the plant’s absorption routes, producing less vitamins and proteins. This is a clear example of the challenges facing agriculture in the future”, Gumina said.



Advances in the productive capacity of crops depend significantly on improved breeding techniques, as water and mineral resources for plant nutrition are increasingly scarce in the world. Unfortunately, however, advances in the regulatory base do not progress at the same speed as science. The regulation of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), which was established more than 18 years ago in many of the major producing countries, was based on knowledge from the 1980s and has remained virtually unchanged to this day, particularly in Europe. Various advances and the emergence of innovative techniques in biotechnology, harms the commercial environment around the world with its current, overly conservative regulatory approach.

As discussed by members of the breeding committee, the countries of Africa, for example, need a rapid modernization of their market, as well as technologies for the agricultural

production system, which have been strongly criticized by farmers in many regions of the continent, but faced significant obstacles due to the high complexity of the regulatory aspect.

The latest global advances in intellectual property, represented during the event by the phrase “illegal practices can hurt us all!”, has shown that many countries allow the occasional commercialization of subsistence-level farmers, which does not affect the chain and has no potential to harm the breeder. However, according to Antonio Villarroel, the greatest difficulty is to establish a consensus among the different countries on what are the common characteristics of a subsistence farmer and occasional trade.

In this way, the Oxford Platinum entities proposed a flowchart demonstrating that, if the traded seed is registered, and used for purposes other than own consumption, and sold to third parties without a trade-

mark and certification; the current practice should be considered as illegal marketing.

ePhyto

In order to follow the digital evolution and its opportunities within the agribusiness, the “Commission of Phytosanitary Measures” created the “ePhyto” system, which aims to facilitate the issuance, control and electronic sending of phytosanitary certificates around the world.

As a project with simple implementation, harmonized rules for participation and low implementation costs (less than US \$ 1 million per country), the system already covers 3 types of agricultural products: plants (IPPC), food security (Codex) and animals (OIE).

Also, the proposal of the international associations is only to offer an alternative to improve the exchange of phytosanitary certificates, being

the participation optional to each country interested in importing and exporting in a safe and reliable way.

In addition, due to the availability of the international hub, access to information becomes instantaneous, efficient and of very low operational cost.

Some of its direct benefits are:

- globally harmonized approach for electronic phytosanitary certification (ePhyto);
- reduction of fraudulent certificates;
- greater efficiency in the arrival and release of plants and plant products;
- reduction of delays in the receipt of replacement phytosanitary certificates (when necessary);
- reduction of bilateral agreements required for direct transfer of NPPOs;
- Use of harmonized international e-business standards between governments (UN / CEFACT).

The system already has countries from all continents and is planned for full implementation in July 2019.

In this system, the proposal is that companies be certified to produce seeds according to previously established safety rules and, thus, move the seeds between the member countries of the system with greater agility.

Again, this is an open proposal for voluntary participation, that is, an alternative to current systems.

Negotiations

During the three days of the event, participants from all over the world organized to negotiate production, import and export seeds at more than 200 tables previously reserved for the participants.

SOME DATA OF THE SEED CONGRESS



The participants of the event could be divided into those who go to carry out business and those that participate in technical meetings of the various committees of ISF, being the most concurred those of plant breeding and field crops. Those who go to business are in greater number, estimating in more than 80% of the total, where each one schedules meeting in advance with the possible partner, being normal to have more than 20 meetings during the three days of the event.

Taking into consideration the greatness of the global seed business, among the diverse range of species of interest and the need to hire seed production in special locations, it is estimated that more than \$ 3 billion are contracted during the event.

For the entrepreneur or company that relies on seed production at special locations or needs to rapidly advance generations of seed multiplication, as well as those dependent on seed import and export, the ISF annual congress is the most appropriate place to be present.

South Africa 2020

The next ISF congress is planned to take place in Cape Town (South Africa) in 2020 and is a great opportunity to get a closer look at the seed business in Africa.

