

# Statement on the increasing adoption of restrictive phytosanitary regulation by several governments

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A STATEMENT PREPARED BY THE INTERNATIONAL SEED FEDERATION

The adoption by different governments of severely restrictive phytosanitary regulations on vegetable seeds is observed to be increasing. The International Seed Federation (ISF), as the global voice of the seed industry, therefore feels it important to reiterate its support for the regulation of pests on seeds only when in accordance with the WTO SPS Agreement and its relevant international standards, including the International Standard for Phytosanitary Measures (ISPM) Number 38: *International Movement of Seeds*. When assessing pest risk and determining appropriate phytosanitary measures to apply, governments should always consider the intended use of the seeds and the adoption of multiple equivalent options so as not to create additional barriers to international trade. Governments should also refrain from introducing prescriptive seed testing protocols that have not been validated internationally. In some instances, phytosanitary measures that are being imposed are not even necessary, as seed is not a pathway for the entry, establishment or spread of the pest in question.

The ISF Regulated Pest List Initiative, or RPLI, aims to facilitate the harmonization of phytosanitary requirements for the international movement of seed by sharing information on regulated pests of internationally traded seed species, based on a scientific assessment of whether they are a pest risk and the experience of the seed industry in managing this risk. These pest lists are independently revised by a minimum of three experts from different seed companies. Currently, the great majority of regulated pests are for pests where seed is not a pathway. On average for 77% of the pests regulated on seed for the vegetable crops listed in the RPLI, seed is neither a pathway nor a host for the pathogen.

Predictable international movement of seed is critical to ensuring food security. The seed industry is concerned that recent phytosanitary measures adopted by some governments for the regulated pest *Tomato brown rugose fruit virus* (ToBRFV) do not follow the ISPM guidance for equivalent measures, nor was enough time provided to exporting governments to comply with the changes in regulations. These phytosanitary measures also negatively impact the exchange of genetic resources internationally due to adoption of prohibited sampling sizes for research and breeding seed lots.

Increased phytosanitary regulation that takes a non-science-based approach contradicts ISPM38, which calls for regulators to recognise equivalent phytosanitary measures for seed movement. Additionally, these increasing regulations significantly add to the costs for, and impact the ability of, seed companies to get seed to farmers when they need it.

Since phytosanitary measures can and do impact trade, it is important that National Plant Protection Organizations (NPPOs) clearly communicate new or changed measures well in advance of implementation, and that these measures are science-based. This is important to allow NPPOs of exporting countries to verify scientific need, feasibility, and trade impact and to prepare for implementation. But it is also important for producers, to anticipate and prepare for quality management adaptations such as: new field inspections to be organized, new tests to be implemented, new seed treatments to be applied, etc.

ISF calls on governments to recognize and implement international standards drafted by the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC), including ISPM 38 and 11, in order to facilitate international agricultural trade and deliver food security. This includes adopting phytosanitary measures that are proportionate to the assessed pest risk for the seeds of a given species, origin, and purpose of import. Global trading operations of plant products rely on crucial communication and transparency of science-based phytosanitary requirements to protect plant health and ensure international safe trade of goods.

ISPM 11: *Pest risk analysis for quarantine pests* clearly recognizes that zero-risk is not a reasonable option in risk management and describes pest risk management as the process of identifying ways

to react to a perceived risk, evaluating the efficacy of these actions and determining the most appropriate mitigation options to achieve the desired level of protection. While countries are free to determine the required level of protection for a given pest in a specific crop and whether that level should be the same for the whole country or for certain areas (e.g. pest free areas or zones of low prevalence), it is a challenge for industry when a country sets the required level of protection unrealistically high. In those cases, a pest risk management measure may become a technical barrier to trade and impact food security.

Seed is a globally traded agricultural product, with international seed trade having increased tenfold during the past 15-20 years. Today there is no country that could fully supply farmers with seed of their choice solely from their own production. Seed companies produce and trial seed in different countries all over the world to mitigate the risk of crop failures due to adverse weather conditions. By finding optimal locations for seed production, timing of harvest, and localized expertise, the seed sector ensures the steady supply of seed for farmers everywhere.

ISF and the seed sector are always willing to work alongside NPPOs on phytosanitary measures as healthy seed is also our goal. We remain committed to our vision of a world where the best quality seed is accessible to all, supporting food security and sustainable agriculture.

