

# Seed as the starting point

Our sector takes part in the journey  
to the Food Systems Summit 2021

## DECLARATION



### INTRODUCTION

We, the actors of the private seed sector, representing its diversity, acting as individuals or as representatives of co-operatives, family-, small-, medium sized- or multinational companies, based around the world, are committed to a future where enough affordable, safe and nutritious food is produced for all without compromising the economies, societies or environments of future generations.

To that end, we welcome the UN Food Systems Summit, set to take place in September 2021, which represents an important opportunity to build a shared understanding and solutions in pursuit of a global food system that contributes to the achievement of all 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

#### Ahead of the Summit, we declare that we:

- **ACKNOWLEDGE** the UN Food and Agricultural Organization's (FAO) definition of a sustainable food system as one that delivers food security and nutrition for all without compromising the economic, social and environmental bases for future generations;
- **NOTE** that, since the dawn of agriculture and even more so since scientific discovery in biology and genetics, plant breeders and farmers have been innovating, improving plants, and increasing yields for hundreds of years;
- **ACKNOWLEDGE** that increased agricultural output has driven significant social and economic progress, but now faces the major challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss, declining soil health, and diminishing resources;
- **ACKNOWLEDGE** that the global food system is failing to serve all, but there is no one-size-fits-all-solution; and that whilst hunger and micronutrient deficiencies grow in some areas, obesity is a major issue elsewhere;
- **ACKNOWLEDGE** the enormous challenge for agriculture to produce sufficient, safe, and nutritious food for a global population, expected to reach 10 billion by 2050;
- **NOTE** that seed is the basis of all crop production, and that the seed sector is a foundational contributor to the production of food;
- **NOTE** that the seed sector is diverse and competitive, consisting of multiple large players and thousands of smaller players in seed markets segmented by crop and geographical location;
- **NOTE** that seed is the vital starting point for all crop production; that without it, there can be no harvest; and that this makes the seed sector a critical partner in the mission to end hunger and to achieve food security and nutrition for all;

## HOW THE PRIVATE SEED SECTOR CONTRIBUTES

In discussing how the seed sector can best contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), we, the signatories of this Declaration:

**RECOGNISE** that food systems must become more equitable, inclusive, and environmentally friendly; and that – whether we engage as individual players or as a sector – our most salient contributions are likely to be towards the UN Sustainable Development Goals on poverty, hunger, economic growth, climate action, biodiversity, responsible consumption and production, and partnerships;

### SDG 1 - End poverty in all its forms everywhere



**NOTE** that the immense task of ending poverty necessarily requires support for smallholder farmers, who represent as much as two thirds of African and Asian populations;

**QUALITY SEEDS  
BOOST SMALLHOLDER  
FARMERS' YIELDS AND  
INCOME**

**NOTE** that quality seeds help alleviate poverty by boosting yields and yield security, allowing smallholder farmers to better nourish themselves and to obtain income;

### SDG 2 - End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture



**NOTE** that the UN's 2020 State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World report shows the number of hungry people has been growing slowly but consistently since 2014, and that, unless action is taken, more than

**THROUGHOUT ITS  
HISTORY THE SEED  
SECTOR HAS  
CONTRIBUTED TO CROP  
PRODUCTIVITY**

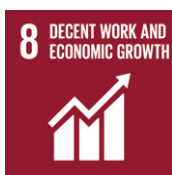
**NOTE** that throughout its history the seed sector has contributed to increased yields, for example in the European Union, where improved seeds boosted crop productivity for nine core arable crops by an average of 20 percent in 15 years, or in Africa, where new maize varieties yield 20 to 30 percent more than other varieties to the benefit of 30 to 40 million people;

840 million people could be undernourished by 2030, not to mention those who suffer malnutrition through the lack of essential vitamins and minerals;

**NOTE** that, on current trends, the world must produce 50 percent more food by 2050; that crop yields must therefore increase at higher than historical rates; and that this increased production must not come from deforestation or any other expansion of agricultural land;

**ACKNOWLEDGE** that the world will need to produce and consume more protein sources, such as wholegrains, legumes, nuts, fresh vegetables and fruits; that the seed sector will need to help identify these sources, the so-called "orphan crops"; and that it will need to improve these varieties, too;

### SDG 8 - Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all



**NOTE** that in large areas of the world, agriculture is the most sizeable source of jobs and livelihoods, and that this is especially true for the most vulnerable and excluded sectors of society, including the poor, women, and rural populations;

**THE SEED SECTOR IS A  
SIGNIFICANT POTENTIAL SOURCE  
OF INCREASED INCOME FOR  
RURAL POPULATIONS**

improved yields, resistance, resilience, adaptability and crop knowledge; but that only 10 percent of the world's smallholder farmers access quality seeds;

rural populations;

**NOTE** that, for many of these farmers, the seed sector remains a significant potential source of increased income through

**ASSERT** that therefore the seed sector has a significant role to play in the promotion of sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth for some of the world's most marginalised populations, including decent work;

## SDG 12 - Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns



**ACKNOWLEDGE** that each year, an estimated one third of all food produced – equivalent to 1.3 billion tonnes worth about USD 1 trillion – ends up rotting in rubbish bins or spoiling due to poor transportation and harvesting;

**ACKNOWLEDGE** that land degradation, declining soil fertility, and unsustainable water use all inhibit our natural resource base from supplying food; but that improved seed and good agricultural practices can help to overcome this challenge;

**IMPROVED VARIETIES CAN HELP MAKE AGRICULTURAL WATER AND LAND USE MORE EFFICIENT**

**ASSERT** that more resilient seeds with better product-shelf life can help to reduce food waste; and that the seed industry is committed to collaborate with the value chain for more responsible production and consumption;

**ASSERT** that the seed sector is helping to reduce agricultural water use by developing varieties, which require less water for their growth; that improved seeds also require less land, lessening the rates of land conversion

and deforestation; and that by enabling agriculture to grow more with less, improved seeds lead to a smaller environmental footprint.

## SDG 13 - Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts



**NOTE** that more than one quarter of the world's greenhouse gas emissions come from agriculture, forestry, and land-use change, and that - without action - these emissions are likely to increase as the global population grows;

**NOTE** that agricultural emissions must be reduced by two-thirds from 2010 levels in order to keep global temperature rise to less than 2°C;

**NOTE** that farmers are also impacted by climate change, which

brings unstable weather patterns, disease, pests, and extreme weather events, such as droughts and flooding;

**THE SEED SECTOR CAN HELP FARMERS ADAPT TO CLIMATE CHANGE**

**ASSERT** that the seed sector can help reduce agricultural emissions by breeding crop plants to better capture carbon, for example, by developing plants with extensive root systems;

**ASSERT** that the seed industry can help farmers adapt to climate change by developing crops that are more resistant to drought and other symptoms of a changing climate.

## SDG 15 - Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss



**ACKNOWLEDGE** that the world needs to shift its current patterns of food production and consumption in order to curb biodiversity loss and deforestation;

**NOTE** that the 2019 IPBES Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem services finds that the loss of biodiversity and ecosystems will undermine progress towards the SDGs, notably on poverty, hunger, health, water, cities, climate, oceans and land;

**OUR SECTOR HELPS PROTECT BIODIVERSITY THROUGH ACCESS AND BENEFIT SHARING**

**NOTE** that the seed sector relies on genetic resources to continue improving seeds; and that the sector helps protect biodiversity through its support for access and benefit sharing mechanisms, such as the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD);

**ASSERT** that the seed sector also contributes to create new diversity among varieties. In a recent study it was demonstrated that the diversity of tomato varieties considerably increased since the 1970s.

## SDG 17 - Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development



**NOTE** that global and regional crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic and outbreaks of plant pest and disease, have led to crop failures in Africa, Latin America and Asia, highlighting the weaknesses and vulnerabilities in our

food systems and global food supply chains;

**NOTE** that the seed sector shares the common unifying goal of providing quality seed for farmers around the world, including

**THE COMPLEXITIES OF THE CHALLENGES REQUIRE EVERYONE IN THE VALUE CHAIN TO COLLABORATE**

in Least Developed Countries (LDCs). Continuous adapted varieties and good quality seed enable farmers to maximise yield while remaining resistant to climate change, pests, and diseases;

**AFFIRM** that the complexities of the challenges above require everybody in the food value chain to collaborate, including the public and private sectors; and that this collaboration is the only way to a global food system fit for the future.

## OUR COMMITMENTS

### Based on the above, we the signatories commit to:

- **SUPPORT** the Food Systems Summit's five Action Tracks, through our participation in the Summit and beyond, providing input throughout the upcoming year;
- **CONTINUE** investing in science and innovation to Develop and Produce varieties that are locally adapted to farmers' needs;
- **DIALOGUE** with any potential partner that shares our goal of feeding the world's growing population, including multilaterals, governments, regional authorities, and public bodies;
- **CONTINUE** our support for the conservation of genetic resources and biodiversity;
- **CONTINUE** to lay the foundation to provide consumers with food that is healthy, safe, nutritious, and varied;
- **ADVOCATE** so that farmers around the world are able to access the seed of their choice, at the right time, and in the right place;
- **SHOW** integrity and demonstrate openness; continue to share information in the agricultural space to be open to ideas, and above all else to contribute to the evolution of food systems for the future of our world.

## OUR ASKS

### To support the private seed sector's contributions to the SDGs, we ask that our partners:

- **RECOGNISE** the foundational contribution of the seed sector to reach the goals of the food systems summit and the SDGs and invite and implicate our representatives at national and international level;
- **SUPPORT** the private seed sector in exploring and utilizing the potential benefits of the latest plant breeding methods, including genome editing, which can, and will, accelerate the improvement of seed varieties;
- **SUPPORT** the adoption of harmonized and science-based regulations for seeds and plant breeding, which creates the necessary guarantees for the farmers and allows for the safe international movement of seeds,
- **RECOGNISE** that if the global seed supply chains break this negatively impacts on the food supply chains and cannot deliver to consumers. This could quickly lead to dangerous food shortages;
- **KEEP** markets functioning, including by keeping borders open to allow the free and efficient movement of seed and prevent crises like COVID-19 crisis from transforming into a hunger crisis, too;
- **SUPPORT** seed sector use of genetic resources, essential to new seed varieties, by supporting improvements to the work of bodies, such as the ITP-GRFA and CBD.



**[To sign on to this Declaration, please click on the this link.](#)**