

LARGEST SEED SECTOR CONGRESS IN THE SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE TAKES PLACE IN CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA

Seed industry professionals from all over the world gathered for the historic ISF World Seed Congress to find solutions to current challenges.

Cape Town – Delegates from 60 countries working in the seed sector have gathered in Cape Town for the largest seed industry event in the southern hemisphere.

The 2023 ISF World Seed Congress brings together professionals involved in the entire seed industry, from research and development to seed testing, production, and distribution.

Jointly organised by the International Seed Federation (ISF) and the South African National Seed Organization (SANSOR), the event takes place at a critical moment for global food supply chains, following months of disruption from persistent inflation, climate extremes and conflict.

With the theme “Shared Roots, Greater Heights”, the program for this year’s event features sessions on enhancing access to quality seed in Africa and beyond, as well as advancing plant breeding innovation, engaging with the value chain, and using digital tools to improve trade.

“Seeds are the starting point of our global food systems, and in the face of a global food crisis, they are the frontline of our recovery,” said Michael Keller, Secretary General of the ISF.

“Quality seed can help address some of the world’s most pressing challenges but only if they can get into the hands of farmers. This remains a major barrier in Africa in particular. The World Seed Congress is a vital opportunity to accelerate collaboration across the sector to allow all farmers the chance to reap the gains of quality seeds.”

Matome Ramokgopa, Chair of SANSOR, added: “It is a tremendous honour and a testament to our thriving seed industry that South Africa is hosting the World Seed Congress, the largest of its kind in the southern hemisphere.

“With such a diverse agricultural economy and range of climates, this is a fitting venue to address the many opportunities and challenges ahead for Africa and for the global seed sector.”

An estimated 23 million people across Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia are facing severe hunger as a record-breaking drought devastates crop harvests. Meanwhile, public investment into crop breeding has flatlined, reaching just \$30 billion a year.

“The private sector is playing an increasingly important role in developing and delivering seeds for the future,” said Marco van Leeuwen, President of the International Seed Federation (ISF) and Managing Director of Dutch seed company Rijk Zwaan.

“We are harnessing the advantages of new tools, from big data and AI to new breeding techniques. For example, improved varieties alone have been credited with up to 50 per cent increases in yield.”

The World Seed Congress offers the opportunity to highlight the potential of innovation and technology, including new varieties that could better cope with climate extremes. For example, hybrid varieties of rice use up to 50 per cent less water, making them less vulnerable to the impact of drought and heatwaves.

But ensuring all farmers have access to the most appropriate seed for local conditions remains a challenge. Strengthening and adapting local seed systems, from certification and regulation to regional and global trade, is a priority theme for the congress.

“In some countries in Africa, only 10 per cent of farmers are planting the latest varieties of seeds despite the enormous gains made by crop innovation,” said Kulani Machaba, President of the African Seed Trade Association (AFSTA).

“A standardised approach to global regulation is needed to help level the playing field.”

David Malan, Chair of the National Organising Committee, added: “Given our breadth of agricultural production, from small-scale to commercial production, we hope South Africa can provide valuable insights and learnings for everyone attending the World Seed Congress.”

Next year’s event, which marks the centenary of the World Seed Congress, will take place in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. ###

Contact

FRANCINE SAYOC

Communications Manager, ISF

+41 22 365 44 20
+41 22 365 44 21

About ISF

ISF is the voice of the global seed sector. Since 1924, it has represented the interests of its members who make up 96% of international seed trade today. Its global reach extends to seed associations and seed companies around the world, and it has official observer status in key intergovernmental and international organizations.

www.worldseed.org

