

AFSTA POSITION PAPER ON VEGETABLE SEED REGULATIONS

(Adopted by AFSTA General Assembly on 29th March 2003 in Nairobi)

Preamble

The African Seed Trade Association (AFSTA) supports activities that enhance seed trade in Africa, with a view to strengthening food security for the continent. In this respect, AFSTA pays special attention to the implementation of seed regulations and considers that they are only necessary if they are essential for the improvement of agriculture, the mainstay of the economies of most African countries. When necessary, seed regulations have to be science-based, fair and practical, in order to prevent them from becoming unjustified trade barriers.

Given the importance of vegetable seed for the health and the economy of African farmers, the Association would like to present this position paper to all seed stakeholders in Africa, particularly the regulatory authorities, in order to create and/or maintain a level playing field, as well as an enabling environment for its development.

Distinctive features of vegetable seeds

Considering technical particularities for vegetable species namely high number of species and varieties, diverse agro-ecological requirements, as well as production techniques, it is impractical to apply the same regulations to them as for the other crop seeds.

Recommendations

AFSTA, therefore, recommends that vegetable seeds should not be subject to mandatory certification in Africa. They should be traded under the label of “standard seed” or “truthfully labelled seed” as is the case in Europe, America, and Asia.

Official Certification should be optional i.e. if the owners of varieties wanted to register their varieties for particular reasons, they would approach the relevant authority and abide by the prevailing regulations for seed certification in the country. However, vegetable seeds offered to farmers must be of high quality and “standard seed” or “truthfully labelled seed” should not in any case imply low quality seed.

All the basic international seed trade rules should be applied, especially the labelling code to permit a possible follow-up control by the officials during distribution.

A national catalogue for vegetable seeds should be elaborated to give farmers and other stakeholders information about characteristics and technical performance of the species and varieties described therein.

Conclusion

These recommendations will facilitate vegetable seed trade within Africa on the one hand and between Africa and the rest of the world on the other. Professionals would be motivated and farmers would have, at reasonable price, a wide range of superior vegetable seed varieties and species that could address their needs for various geographic locations thereby sustaining their livelihood.

AFSTA appeals to the seed people in Africa to strive towards the implementation of all conditions for ensuring production of high quality vegetable seed and take the necessary steps to respect the ethics of seed business to the benefit of African farmers.

AFSTA is willing to reinforce the partnership between public and private sectors in order to foster vegetable seed trade by implementing harmonized regulations in the respective African country and if possible in the existing or future economic unions or free exchange zones in Africa.