

AFSTA POSITION PAPER ON VEGETABLE SEED REGULATIONS

(Revised in March 2020)

Preamble

The African Seed Trade Association (AFSTA) supports activities that enhance seed trade in Africa, with a view to strengthening food and nutritional 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. To this end, seed regulations have to be science-based, fair and practical, and in no way used as unjustified trade barriers.

Given the importance of vegetable seed for the health and the economy of millions African population, 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 the high number of species and varieties, diverse agro-ecological requirements, as well as production techniques, it is impractical to apply the same regulations to over 320 species of vegetables as it pertains to other crop seeds (mainly field crops).

Recommendations

While it may be very important to include vegetables in variety releases, given new initiatives such as the African Vegetable Breeding Consortium (AVBC), led by the World Vegetable Center in collaboration with AFSTA., Worldwide, very little vegetable seed is certified according to the rules and regulations of international seed schemes, mainly due to the short lifespan of varieties and the high introduction level of new varieties. AFSTA recommends that vegetable seeds should not be subject to mandatory certification in Africa. They should be traded under either the label of “standard seed” of OECD seed scheme or “truthfully labelled seed”.

All the basic international seed trade rules and principles should be applied, especially with regards to labelling information and traceability. Indicating for example the lot reference number will permit a possible follow-up control by the officials during distribution.

Where considered necessary by a State, a national catalogue for vegetable seeds could be elaborated to give farmers and other stakeholders information about characteristics

of the varieties described therein. It should not include compulsory experimentation about technical performance. However, it is recommended that an applicant be required to carry out verification trials that are open to official inspection. Ultimately, inclusion of a variety in a national catalogue should not be a mandatory prerequisite for the vegetable seed trade and commercialization.

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 a 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 all involved in the seed trade in Africa to strive towards the implementation of all conditions for ensuring production and marketing of high quality vegetable seed, and to take the necessary steps to respect the ethics of the seed business to the benefit of millions of African farmers.

AFSTA makes itself available to facilitate the reinforcement of the partnership between public, private sectors and international bodies to achieve a vegetable seed trade that is harmonized continentally and globally and that works to the benefit of all stakeholders.