



# PRESS RELEASE

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ESA is the voice of the European seed industry, representing those active in research, breeding, production and marketing of seeds of agricultural and ornamental plant species. It represents 37 national seed associations (and with that more than 1000 seed businesses in the EU, most of them SMEs) and 55 direct company members.

ESA's mission is to work for fair and proportionate regulation of the European seed industry, freedom of choice for customers in supplying seeds as a result of innovative, diverse technologies and production methods and for effective protection of intellectual property rights relating to plants and seed.

**Contact:**

**ESA**

**European Seed Association**

Tel. 0032-2-7432860

[secretariat@euroseeds.org](mailto:secretariat@euroseeds.org)

[www.euroseeds.org](http://www.euroseeds.org)

## Second World Seed Conference calls for urgent measures on seed to help assure food security

Higher public and private investment in the seed sector is precondition for agriculture to meet the challenge of food security before the background of population growth and climate change

The Second World Seed Conference was held at FAO headquarters from September 8-10, organized in collaboration by OECD, UPOV, FAO, ISTA, ISF\* and assembled the leading institutions and business representatives of the seed sector worldwide. While the global seed market has grown rapidly in recent years and is currently worth around US\$37 billion and is a highly international business with cross border seed trade estimated at some US\$6.4 billion, still a lot more needs to be done to encourage more investment. Specifically, the conference conclusions called for a predictable, reliable, user friendly and affordable regulatory environment to ensure that breeders continue to make the long term investment necessary to provide farmers with high quality seed.

“The Conference quite rightly highlights the critical role of new plant varieties and high quality seed for competitive and sustainable agriculture”, Garlich v. Essen, Secretary General of ESA European Seed Association commented and specifically underlined the importance of an enabling regulatory environment: “The seed industry can meet the challenge! But governments must develop and maintain the respective legislation and share responsibility in enforcing it, especially as regards breeders’ intellectual property rights.” Without an assured return on the required long term investment (on average, new varieties need some 7 to 15 years of research and development to get to the market) due to IP infringements, the seed industry fears that it will be impossible to mobilize more capital and human resources for plant breeding.

“Of course, this is even more important considering new breeding techniques and modern biotechnology that provide further tools to plant breeders to speed up innovation. If you get the regulatory system wrong, it becomes a real obstacle for companies that instead of supporting innovation is actually hindering it.”, v. Essen stresses by pointing specifically to the vast majority of small and medium sized enterprises in the plant breeding industry. “These companies want to invest. But they can’t afford to spend even more on regulatory approvals than on their actual R&D.”

Generally, ESA is content with the conclusions from the World Seed Conference which highlighted the need for more research and development to help increase productivity and sustainability and the important role of governmental bodies to assure a suitable legal framework to support breeding. “I think the conference clearly showed

that we have the right bodies in place – the FAO for assuring access to genetic resources, UPOV for assuring intellectual property protection for breeders, OECD for seed trade and ISTA for the technical aspects of quality testing. But we must make sure that their rules remain relevant in the future. Here, the European seed industry is currently highly active to contribute to shape a competitive regulatory environment for the EU under the so-called “Better Regulation” initiative. Hopefully, this may serve as a blueprint for further discussion also at international level’, Garlich v. Essen summarizes the appreciation of the conference.

If you are interested in the conclusions of the 2nd World Seed Conference, please click on the official press release: **esa\_09.0674**

\* Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD); International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV); United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO); International Seed Testing Association (ISTA); International Seed Federation (ISF)