

CropLife Asia Position Paper:
Importance of Diverse National Seed Sourcing & Robust International Supply Chains

In 2021, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) released a report containing insightful research and analysis regarding the impact of COVID-19 on global and Asian seed supply chains. Included in this report were a series of recommendations to ensure the availability of quality seeds to help drive global food production. Chief among these was the conclusion that governments should maintain and further enhance the international regulatory framework for seed production and trade. This action will support the development of robust international seed supply chains and the diversification of seed production. The framework will ensure the genetic integrity and health of seeds during their production and facilitate the exchange of seeds between countries by preventing non-tariff barriers. Ultimately, this will also ensure the protection of plant breeders' rights in seed-producing countries by encouraging breeders to allow multiplication of their varieties in multiple locations around the world. CropLife Asia and the seed companies it represents support the recommendations put forth by OECD in this important report.

Seed companies play a crucial role in seed production, assisting farmers by ensuring timely and adequate availability of certified quality seeds with suitable varieties at reasonable prices. They're also an essential player in the push to maintain and increase yields to feed the growing global population while adapting to climate change and environmental pressures. Production or maintenance of genetically pure and other quality seeds is an important task which entails a host of factors. Seed production involves genetic and agronomic principles to preserve genetic purity of seeds which ultimately leads to higher seed yields and new improved varieties.

Through their international seed production capabilities, CropLife Asia and its member companies promote competitiveness and guarantee that farmers in most countries have seed technologies available, regardless of where they are produced. They also support governments by helping ensure national food supply security, resiliency and sustainability by enabling farmers to produce more food with fewer impact to the world around us. However, a number of governments are putting in place requirements with respect to local seed production that threaten this progress. Policies that establish local seed production as a means to eliminate seed imports create significant barriers to the continuous supply of seeds nationally.

The OECD report addresses this increasingly important issue. Specifically, it states that:

- Most countries cannot sufficiently supply their farmers with their preferred seeds solely from their own national seed production. Thus, internationally-interconnected seed supply chains have considerable benefits for the majority of countries in terms of their economic stability and activity.
- There are significant economic risks that result from nationalizing seed production and these can be mitigated by promoting policies that maintain international seed supply chains.
- Supporting diverse seed production in different locations worldwide is beneficial for seed supply chain stability and the availability of diverse varietal choices for local farmers and helps ensure international seed companies continue to produce high-quality seeds for their availability.

Ensuring our region's farmers have access to the tools and technology to sustainably grow the food on which we depend, including a broad portfolio of seeds, is a responsibility shared by all food value chain stakeholders. Promoting diverse seed production in different locations regionally and worldwide is beneficial for the stability of the seed supply and the livelihood of farmers.

Though well-intended, national policies that shift to greater reliance on local seed production result in unintended repercussions to farmers, food security and the larger food value chain. Accordingly, the following realities are respectfully submitted to governments considering a shift to greater local seed production reliance:

- Maintaining the flexibility to import seeds helps ensure access to changing genetics/products that can alleviate various pest and disease pressures / Not all genetics can be produced locally
- In times of calamity and crisis, having the option to import needed seeds can help mitigate threats to food and national security
- Limiting farmer access to seeds produced locally alone can adversely impact their ability to produce key crops and ultimately endanger national and regional food security
- Internationally-produced and imported seeds bring the benefit of global R&D support
- An increase in local seed production reliance results in: a reduction with global R&D in-country investment; limited national access to the best germplasm available; and a detrimental effect to collaboration between local researchers and global producers
- The seed production process entails multiple steps and is difficult to fully replicate in countries lacking needed expertise and capacity
- A robust national intellectual property (IP) protection policy aligning with UPOV 1991 is needed to support breeders' rights and protect the IP of newly-developed varieties (germplasm security)
- For any seed breeders, safety measures should be in place and enforced with respect to parental production

In light of these realities, CropLife Asia supports flexible national seed policies that allow both local seed production and seed imports to ensure that farmers have access to the innovation needed to drive food security. Ensuring a robust seeds landscape where both local production is encouraged and international supply chains remain vibrant will help ensure the production and availability of high-quality seeds from modern varieties. This approach yields economic and social benefits across the food value chain.

Literature Cited:

OECD (2021), *The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Global and Asian Seed Supply Chains*, OECD Food, Agriculture and Fisheries Paper, https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/agriculture-and-food/the-impact-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-on-global-and-asian-seed-supply-chains_e7650fde-en