

IMPROVED SEEDS: CRITICAL INPUT TO HELP FARMERS ADAPT TO CLIMATE CHANGE

Defining agriculture's contributions towards achieving SDG13–Climate Action was one of the key topics addressed this week at the United Nations High Level Political Forum in New York. Goal 13 calls for “urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts”. One of its 5 targets is to “strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters in all countries.”

For the seed sector, this means fostering innovation in order to sustain the delivery of improved seeds that will help farmers adapt to climate change. All around the world, the consequences of climate change can be clearly observed and farm production is at risk. Extreme weather conditions such as flooding and drought regularly undermine production of crops such as wheat, corn, rice or vegetables, bankrupting farmers and increasing food and nutrition poverty locally, regionally and globally. Resources such as water and land must be used more efficiently.

“Within the next 30 years, the world must produce 60 percent more food, even as climate change threatens any progress. That is only possible if the world's smallholder farmers have access to varieties of their choice. Quality seeds of improved varieties can enable them to enjoy the benefits and advances that have already for decades significantly increased yields in developed countries,” said Michael Keller, Secretary General of the International Seed Federation.

Through plant breeding innovations, the seed sector is working constantly to provide farmers with solutions that will enable them to respond to climate challenges. Today's plant breeders have developed climate-resilient varieties, such as drought-tolerant maize, and rust-resistant wheat that yield well despite drought conditions. Innovations in plant breeding have also led to the development of varieties that have higher resistance to pests and diseases, which is critical to farmers as disease pressure increases with the rise in temperature. Further, the ability to grow crops under a diverse range of climatic and ecological conditions also means that crops can be produced where they are needed, reducing the need to transport produce and therefore contributing to reducing carbon footprint.

The seed sector acknowledges its role in contributing to a more sustainable future and has embraced the SDGs. Last month at the ISF World Seed Congress 2019 in France, sustainability was high on the agenda among business leaders and stakeholders – in particular how the seed sector must sustain innovation in a socially accepted manner in order to respond to current global food challenges.

The seed sector contributes to a majority of the 17 SDGs adopted by the United Nations, such as: no poverty; zero hunger; good health and well-being; decent work and economic growth; industry, innovation and infrastructure; responsible consumption and production; climate action; life on land; and partnerships for the goals.

“Crop failure is not an option. It is our fundamental challenge to support farmers who are on the front line of climate change, and we can perform this role if we are able to sustain innovation,” said Keller. “Achieving the right environment for innovation and movement of seed requires constant engagement among industry, farmers, and government to ensure alignment of global policies. This continues to be the focus of ISF.”

About the UN-HLPF

The High-level Political Forum is the United Nations central platform for follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The 2019 HLPF, convened under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) will be held from Tuesday, 9 July to Thursday, 18 July 2019; including the three-day ministerial meeting of the forum from Tuesday, 16 July, to Thursday, 18 July 2018.

The set of goals to be reviewed in depth is the following:

- Goal 4 Quality education
- Goal 8 Decent work and economic growth
- Goal 10 Reduce inequalities
- Goal 13 Climate action
- Goal 16 Peace, justice and strong institutions
- Goal 17 Partnerships for the Goals

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About ISF

ISF is the voice of the global seed industry. It has represented the interests of its members since 1924, and represents 96% of the international seed trade today. With a global reach extending to members around the world and official observer status in intergovernmental and international organizations, ISF is uniquely positioned to assist in the development of government policy and business strategy.

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