

Movement of seed under the COVID-19 crisis

The world faces a serious health crisis with "SARS-CoV-2" and the disease it causes "coronavirus disease 2019" (COVID-19), now declared by the World Health Organization as a pandemic. ISF joins the global community in supporting measures to prevent further spread of the virus.

ISF also believes that the world's long-term stability rests on several pillars, one of which is food security.

Seed is the starting point of the food system. Farmers everywhere depend on access to quality seed in order to grow healthy crops. Seed is a globally traded agricultural product, with international seed trade having increased tenfold during the past 15-20 years. Therefore, unrestricted international movement of seed is critical to ensure food security.

Today there is no country that could fully supply farmers with seed of their choice solely from their own production. Seed companies produce and trial seed in different countries all over the world as a way to mitigate the risk of crop failures due to adverse weather conditions. By finding optimal locations for seed production, timing of harvest, and localized expertise, the seed sector ensures the steady supply of seed for farmers everywhere.

Therefore, closing borders or even slowing down the transboundary movement of seeds could create a significant problem in the seed supply chain. March and April are the most critical months for the sowing of spring crops (maize, sunflower, soybean, canola, spring wheat and barley, open field vegetables, etc) in the northern hemisphere and autumn crops in the southern hemisphere.

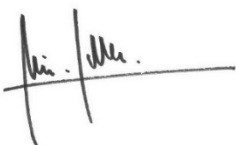
If farmers miss this window because seed is not delivered to the fields in time, the result would be serious food and feed shortages in the second part of the year. This is a situation that we cannot afford in these already volatile times.

ISF asks governments to facilitate the international movement of seed and not to impose restrictive measures. Seed companies will take all necessary measures to guarantee the health and safety of workers who are involved in the shipment of seed.

According to the [European Food Safety Authority](#) (EFSA), [Center for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC), and the [Bundesinstitut für Risikobewertung](#) (BfR), there is currently no evidence that food including seed is a likely source or route of transmission of the virus. Transmission via surfaces which have recently been contaminated with the virus is, nonetheless, possible through smear infections. However, this is only likely to occur during a short period after contamination, due to the relatively low stability of coronaviruses in the environment.

In short, because of poor survival of coronaviruses on surfaces, there is likely very low risk of spread from products or packaging that are shipped over a period of days or weeks at ambient temperatures. Coronaviruses are mainly thought to be spread from person to person – mainly via respiratory droplets that people sneeze, cough, or exhale.

The seed sector seeks the support of public authorities in ensuring seed movement during this time of crisis. We remain committed to our vision of a world where the best quality seed is accessible to all, supporting food security and sustainable agriculture.



Michael Keller
Secretary General