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Message from Michael

At the ISF Mid-term Meetings in Budapest last month - which attracted a record number of participants - our strategic objectives were adopted. The objectives reflect ISF's priorities for 2016: innovation, movement of seed, intellectual property, biodiversity and internal/external engagement, and set the direction for the development of the five-year strategic plan. In the final phase of the ISF 2020 project the ISF sections, groups, committees and ordinary members will be invited to provide input into the strategic plan at the March Meetings next year.

Speaking during the opening ceremony of the 6th Governing Body of the International Treaty in Rome earlier this month I took the opportunity to remind country representatives and participants about the often insufficient contribution of breeders to conservation, and the sustainable use of plant genetic resources. ISF has galvanized the support of its members worldwide who share our commitment to making the Treaty's Multilateral System fit for purpose and harmonizing its SMTA with the business principles that underpin the diversity of companies engaged in commercial breeding around the world. During the ISF Mid-term Meetings, the Sustainable Agriculture Committee agreed to establish a working group that will further develop scenarios, options and mandates based on these principles in order to provide input into the ongoing debate via the FAO's ad hoc open working group.

While I was assisting the Australian Seed Association's Board Meeting in Brisbane last month I was struck by how many common issues are shared by seed associations around the world despite the degree of regional variation. Strengthening cooperation with regional associations is becoming increasingly important, particularly at a time when we as an industry need to stand united on the global issues at international meetings. We opened the doors of our Mid-term Committee Meetings to regional associations (who attended as observers) and agreed the steps we will take to strengthen our industry position when it comes to preparing for meetings of the International Treaty, OECD, UPOV and so on. I started the ball rolling in Nairobi last month while assisting at the African Seed Trade Association's Board of Directors meeting where OECD Seed Schemes and Plant Breeding and Innovation were on the agenda. ISF will continue to strive to strengthen cooperation with national and regional associations. How we achieve this will be on the agenda of the 2016 March Meetings that will be held in Rabat, Morocco.

ISF goes to Gates Foundation

ISF President Alvaro Eyzaguirre together with past President Tim Johnson, Breeders Committee Chair Usha Zehr and ASTA CEO Andy Lavigne met with the Gates Foundation at their Seattle headquarters to discuss the current and future actions of the Foundation in the seed sector. On the agenda were Access to Seed Index (AtSI), the strengthening of seed associations in Africa and the role of public and private breeding with regard to food security and sustainable agriculture. In the coming weeks there will be an update on AtSI from ISF. Plans are underway to enable coordination with African members of ISF and the African Association of Seed and Trade to strengthen cooperation within seed associations in Africa.

PBI communications

As plant breeding innovation (PBI) becomes a global issue, the development of consistent policies is critical to minimize the impact on the movement, trade and innovation on seed worldwide. ISF took the initiative this month by establishing a working group dedicated to communications comprising specialists from associations and industry who are collaborating on the development of a suite of tools to align our members' communications on this strategic priority.

The PBI Communications Working Group (WG) was created to support the delivery of the PBI WG's communications and engagement strategy which started with the development of the statement and principles. As part of its outreach ISF is engaging with stakeholders in the value chain and earlier this month brought together government and industry representatives from around the world with the aim of moving towards consistent global policy.

ISF proposes ISTA working group for vegetables

The importance of internationally accepted standards for testing seeds is recognized by the vegetable seed industry and by many countries that require the ISTA Orange International Certificate to allow import of seed lots. However, ISTA rules and methods are not widely used by the vegetable seed sector as they don't completely meet its needs. In response to a proposal submitted by ISF the Executive Committee of ISTA set up a working group (WG) to address the needs of the international vegetable seed industry. The 15-strong WG will define the priorities and agree how ISTA should address the issues identified.

ISF establishes network of vegetable experts

To handle the increasing number of market access issues, ISF's Vegetable & Ornamental Board has established a virtual network of experts which can be activated as and when an issue arises. ISF involvement in projects to facilitate the international trade of seed is ongoing with work carried out by its horizontal committees and crop specific sections. While ISF horizontal committees deal mainly with policy issues, market access issues often require expert knowledge and immediate action. Due to its nature the vegetable seed sector is greatly exposed to market access problems, including phytosanitary issues, with more than 50 different crops produced in countries other than where treatment, packing and sales take place.

TARC action plan

At the meeting in Vienna last month the Trade & Arbitration Rules Committee (TARC) agreed its action plan for activities in the next biennium. The priorities identified are the revision of parts C and D of the Procedure Rules for Dispute Settlement, and promotion of the use of the Trade Rules through seminars, workshops, meetings and materials. The new version of ISF Procedure Rules for Dispute Settlement entered into force on 1 July 2015 for all arbitration cases unless otherwise agreed by the parties. Among the changes are the structural reorganization, the time specification and the introductory explanation of the arbitration chambers' secretary role.

Forage & Turf Section Board - letter to AFBI

At the Mid-term Meetings in Budapest the Forage & Turf Section Board recommended that ISF wrote a letter to the AFBI (Agri-food and Biosciences Institute) in response to the planned closure of the Plant Testing Station in Crossnacreevy in Northern Ireland, UK. The letter highlighted breeders' and seed companies' concerns about the loss of knowledge, experience and this important site for the evaluation of varieties. The AFBI's Director was very pleased to receive ISF's

recognition of his team's work and reassured us that the potential loss of expertise will be addressed by staff training until the station closes in a few years.

Inside ISF

The next Mid-term Meetings will take place between 17-21 October 2016 in the beautiful city of Bordeaux, France. Dates for your diary:

- 17 October: Intellectual Property Committee
- 18 October: Sustainable Agriculture Committee
- 19 October: Breeders Committee, Phytosanitary Committee, Field Crops Section
- 20 October: Forage & Turf Section, Vegetable & Ornamentals Section, Executive Committee
- 21 October: Board of Directors

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