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ISF VIRTUAL CONGRESS 2021

Global seed sector takes another step in the journey to resilience



Nyon, Switzerland – The International Seed Federation (ISF) has recently concluded its three-day virtual congress themed “[Our Journey to Resilience Starts with Seed](#).” The event came just three weeks before the Rome pre-summit of the UN Food Systems Summit which will set the stage for the culminating global event in September.

Building resilient food systems took the center stage during the event, attended by 1,150 delegates from 65 countries. The virtual congress brought together industry leaders and external partners in a series of international panels, keynote speeches, showcase of innovations, and live interactions.

Keynote speaker Peter Bakker of the World Business Council for Sustainable Development reflected on the importance of the UN Food Systems Summit (UN FSS): “Very simply said, without transforming the food systems, we have no hope of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The UN has taken a very courageous approach to the Summit: it should be a summit of the people, meaning all stakeholders should be present; and it should be a summit of action - not a talk show but really coming together to decide how we are going to innovate and transform the system.”



“Without transforming the food systems, we have no hope of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals,” said Peter Bakker of the World Business Council for Sustainable Development.

The virtual congress also gave ISF an opportunity to further review and strategize on the importance of global seed trade, harmonized policies and the critical role of innovation, to provide services to member companies, achieve success for farmers and society, further supporting in fact the UN FSS and SDG goals. A panel discussion took place on the key learnings on seed trade under COVID-19, where the OECD presented a study analyzing the impact of the pandemic on the seed supply chain in the Asian continent. Another panel discussion was held on the topic of emerging pests and diseases, calling for cooperation among government, public research and the private sector to reduce these risks.

The World Trade Organization, represented by Senior Counsellor Doaa Abdel-Motaal emphasized the need for robust international trade to ensure food security: “We need the seed industry to call for strong multilateral trading systems and to protect the gains that took so long to create. The WTO is your ally as you pursue all of the demands that are now being placed on your industry,” said Abdel-Motaal. “There can be no food systems without seeds, and there can be no food systems transformation without improved seeds.”



In his opening speech, ISF President Donald Coles cited the impact of the solutions offered by the sector to global challenges: “In the last few decades, in regions where biotechnology has been adopted, we have contributed to increasing yields by an average of 16.5 percent for corn and 13.7 percent for cotton; reducing pesticide use through more resilient crops; and decreasing tillage and fuel use through adoption of new and innovative varieties. We are now being asked to solve one of humankind’s most intractable problems: climate change. Carbon sequestration has been identified as a vital activity to support food production systems. The way we will do this is by using seed to create plants with a root system that can absorb excess carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.”

ISF Secretary General Michael Keller sees the congress as a step to further align the seed sector’s contributions to resilient food systems and delivering progress on all SDGs. Among the initiatives outlined by the private seed sector as crucial are:

- Initiating a network of experience and knowledge on seed resilience in partnership with others

- Building a flagship project with partners for a sustainable seed system based on inclusiveness in a country
- Further progress to achieve best practices for access to improved varieties and crop management

Santosh Attavar, who chairs the ISF Task Force for the UN Food Systems Summit and recently elected second vice president of the association said: "We see the opportunity for the seed sector to keep contributing to resilient food systems. We want to remain part of the solution. We are ready to engage and to build alliances."

Earlier in the year, hundreds of seed companies and associations representing all regions came together to sign a [Seed Sector Declaration](#) committing to actively support achievement of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and proactively demonstrate their extensive and diverse contributions towards sustainable food systems.

ISF will continue to engage with stakeholders in the coming months leading to the summit in New York.



About ISF

ISF is the voice of the global seed sector. 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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