

Illegal seed practices – a threat to farmer livelihoods, food security and sustainable agriculture

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CONTEXT

Seed is the most important input in crop production. Reliable, quality seeds are vital to agriculture and the food supply chain. High-quality seeds enable farmers to boost crop productivity, improve livelihoods, and feed a growing population.

In recent years, there has been an increase in illegal seed practices, including counterfeit seeds, fake seeds, fraudulent labelling, intellectual property infringements, regulatory offences, trademark infringements and thefts of proprietary material. In some countries during recent growing seasons, more than 50% of crop seed sold to farmers was illegal or counterfeit.¹

THREATS

Illegal seed practices compromise the quality of seed sold when, for example:

- grain harvested from hybrids is misrepresented and sold as genuine hybrid seed for sowing
- seed packages are labelled with false variety names
- minimum seed quality standards, like varietal purity or germination percentage, are not met
- the percentage of seeds from weeds and invasive species exceeds legal standards

Those who undertake illegal seed practices are misleading and exploiting farmers. They place farmers' livelihoods and families at risk and decrease the overall capacity of sustainable food production. Continued sales of illegal seeds threatens farmers' confidence in the seed sector. In such cases, farmers may not receive important supporting benefits available from seed producers and suppliers, such as crop production advice to achieve the best harvest.

The use of illegal seeds can ruin the reputation and economic prospects of an entire agricultural region or a key national commodity. It further undermines continuing investment by breeders and seed producers to develop, produce and deliver better quality seeds.

Moreover, these practices are commonly connected with criminal activities, such as tax evasion, fraud, corruption and even labour exploitation, all of which have a negative impact on society.

POSITION

ISF calls on all stakeholders in the seed value chain, from plant breeders to seed producers, processors, traders and distributors, to operate in line with the applicable laws to deliver legal seed

¹ World Bank. 2017. Enabling the Business of Agriculture 2017. Washington, D.C: World Bank. doi:10.1596/978-1-4648-1021.

products to farmers so they can be confident in the integrity of the formal seed industry.

ISF expects governments to establish and maintain strong legal protection for seed and plant products through appropriate laws and regulations and to enforce them effectively against those who engage in illegal seed practices.

ISF is convinced it is critical that all parties commit to these conditions to ensure:

- supply of highest quality of seed,
- significant and guaranteed benefits for farmers,
- a vibrant local and regional seed industry to promote agricultural productivity and sustainability, and
- local, national, regional, and global food security.

OUR ENGAGEMENT

ISF and its members will increase engagement with plant breeders, seed producers, processors, traders and distributors to counter illegal seed practices.

ISF and its members will strengthen advocacy with all relevant stakeholders, including government ministries, agencies, judicial systems and international organizations, to improve legal systems and enforcement conditions, capacity and capabilities.

