

April 4, 2016

The Honorable Bob Corker
Chairman
Committee on Foreign Relations
United States Senate
444 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 205120

The Honorable Ben Cardin
Ranking Member
Committee on Foreign Relations
United States Senate
446 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Corker and Ranking Member Cardin:

By the year 2050, farmers will be required to grow twice as much food as they currently produce to feed rapidly growing numbers of people inhabiting earth. Food will be grown in the face of greater strains on water, soil, and energy resources. A significant portion of addressing this burden falls to plant breeders who, if they are to be successful, must have the tools necessary to meet this goal. Our organizations urge the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to recommend ratification of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, as they did in 2010, and encourage the Senate to take swift action. As agriculture is asked to do more, it is important that U.S. researchers are not left behind in their ability to access the most basic materials needed to improve seeds and food.

Over the last 10,000 years, civilization has created a situation where twelve cultivated species provide approximately 90% of the world's food. In fact, four crops (rice, wheat, maize and potatoes) account for more than 50% of dietary energy globally. In addition to these caloric staples, American consumers desire year-round access to a wide array of fruits, vegetables and grains. Many of these crops are grown in the U.S., but significant genetic diversity used by breeders to meet consumer's needs comes from other countries. The U.S., like all countries, is dependent on genetic resources for plant breeding, which is the basis of our food, coming from other world areas.

Plant breeding is the means by which germplasm, in the form of seeds and plant materials, is converted into the food that provides what the global population needs to survive and thrive. Plant breeding investigates and unlocks the genetic potential of plants to sustainably increase yields in the face of increasing challenges such as drought, pests and diseases. Throughout history, plant breeders have generated new diversity using plant materials sourced from around the world to increase plants' ability to withstand stress and to introduce characteristics prized by consumers. These advances have only been possible because the exchange of germplasm across country borders has been recognized as a common good.

The global food system is interdependent. International exchange of plant materials dates back millennia from Native Americans who introduced corn into the northern continent and more recently to the earliest North American settlers who brought seeds from their home countries. In the modern era, a rational international system to facilitate exchange of plant materials across borders is needed. The International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (Treaty) was created as a specialized, global system for the management and exchange of plant genetic resources. Two foundational principles of the Treaty are that "plant genetic resources are a common concern of all countries" and "[they] are the raw material indispensable for crop genetic improvement".

The U.S. was integrally involved in negotiating the finalized treaty and signed it in 2002 during the Bush administration. However, ratification is still pending in the Senate. Today, 139 countries have ratified

the Treaty, many of which are key competitors with the U.S. in international seed markets. Importantly, these include the EU28 including France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Spain and UK, as well as Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Japan, India, and most of Africa and Central America. As the world's largest market for seeds and the largest seed exporter, it is time for the U.S. to join other nations and ratify the Treaty.

Support for U.S. ratification is robust because it provides facilitated access to plant materials for Contracting Parties. Although the U.S. National Plant Germplasm System (NPGS) gene banks are impressive, they are not all-encompassing. The U.S. still needs to access genetic resources from other countries, many of which are Parties to the Treaty. The time is right to ratify the Treaty because Parties to the Treaty are now discussing how to improve its functionality and make it more user-friendly like our NPGS. It is critical the United States be a full participant in these discussions.

Ratification will require no changes within the U.S. NPGS system. The USDA, public university researchers and U.S. companies must already comply with the terms of the Treaty for all the germplasm acquired from Contracting Parties and from the 15 global centers that form the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR). Ratification, would give the U.S. a prominent voice in making the Treaty more user friendly for both private and public sector users of international germplasm. Without ratification, the United States would miss an opportunity to protect our national interests in these on-going discussions on refining the operations of the Treaty.

Currently, public and private sector breeders are vulnerable to the Nagoya Protocol, which was established under the auspices of the Convention on Biological Diversity and goes beyond the agriculture sector. The Nagoya Protocol is a far less favorable option for germplasm exchange for U.S. agriculture researchers and the entire U.S. seed sector. Exchanges under the Nagoya Protocol currently have no precedence. As such, they create legal uncertainty as well as being potentially cumbersome and more costly than under the Treaty.

The situation in the U.S. is prime for ratification. No U.S. laws would need to be changed. The Treaty would not alter access to U.S. gene banks by U.S. researchers. The Treaty will not diminish existing intellectual property protections and there are no additional funding obligations associated with ratification of the Treaty.

We urge the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to hold a hearing on the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture as soon as possible. It is critical that the Committee recommend ratification of the Treaty, as they did in 2010, so that U.S. researchers have the opportunity to unlock the full potential of seeds to feed a hungry world.

Sincerely,

AgReliant Genetics (Indiana)
American Farm Bureau Federation
American Phytopathological Society
American Seed Trade Association
American Society of Plant Biologists

American Soybean Association
Arkansas Seed Dealers' Association
Bayer CropScience LP (North Carolina)
Beck's Hybrids (Indiana)
Biotechnology Innovation Organization (BIO)
California Seed Association
Colorado Seed Industry Association
Condor Seed (Arizona)
Crop Production Services (Colorado)
Crop Science Society of America
Curtis & Curtis (New Mexico)
Delaware-Maryland Agribusiness Association
Dow AgroSciences (Indiana)
DuPont Pioneer (Iowa)
Enza Zaden U.S. (California)
Georgia Agribusiness Council
Georgia Crop Improvement
Georgia Seed Association
Grain and Feed Association of Illinois
Grassland Oregon
GROWMARK (Illinois)
HED Seeds (California)
HeinzSeed (California)
HM.CLAUSE, Inc. (California)
Idaho-Eastern Oregon Seed Association
Illinois Fertilizer & Chemical Association
Illinois Seed Trade Association
Independent Professional Seed Association
Indiana Seed Trade Association
Iowa Seed Association
J.R. Simplot Company (Idaho)
JoMar Seeds (Indiana)
Justin Seed (Texas)
Kansas Seed Industry Association
Kansas Wheat Alliance
Keithly-Williams Seeds (Arizona)
Land O'Lakes, Inc (Minnesota)
Latham Hi-Tech Seeds (Iowa)
Limagrain Cereal Seeds
Monsanto (Missouri)
National Association of Plant Breeders
National Association of Wheat Growers
National Corn Growers Association

National Cotton Council
National Council of Commercial Plant Breeders
National Farmers Union
National Sorghum Producers
Nebraska Agri-Business
New York State Agribusiness Association
North Carolina Seedsmen's Association
Northern Seed Trade Association
Northwest Nursery Improvement Institute
Ohio AgriBusiness Association
Oregon Seed Association
Oregonians for Food & Shelter
Pacific Seed Association
Produce Marketing Association
RiceTec (Texas)
Rocky Mountain Agribusiness Association
Rural and Agriculture Council of America
Sakata Seed America (California)
Seedway LLC (Pennsylvania)
Sharp Bros Seed (Kansas)
Southern Crop Production Association
Southern Seed Association
Syngenta North America (Minnesota)
Texas Ag Industries Association
Texas Seed Trade Association
US Rice Producers Association
USA Rice Federation
Vilmorin, North America
Warner Seeds (Texas)
Washington Tree Fruit Research Commission
Wisconsin Agri-Business Association
Wyoming Ag-Business Association
Wyoming Wheat Marketing Commission