

# New global standard for safer international trade of seeds and plants adopted

During its 12th session, the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC)'s governing body, the Commission on Phytosanitary Measures (CPM) adopted a new global standard to help ensure that international trade in plants and seeds is safer.



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## Dangerous stowaways

In this globalised world, food and agricultural products are continuously on the move. Ships are constantly underway from port to port, each year ferrying more than 500 million large steel containers filled with all kinds of cargo to and from all corners of the planet. Unfortunately, that cargo can sometimes hide stowaways - agricultural pests that once on shore can devastate crops - from gypsy moths to giant African snails to Argentine ants. The rapid growth in agricultural trade via online marketplaces is aggravating the situation, making it harder for countries to ensure that all shipments - big or small - are free from bugs and diseases.

Of particular concern is the threat of pest transmission posed by seeds. Unlike other agricultural products that are destined for consumption, such as wheat, barley or lentils, seeds are a cause for greater concern - being destined for planting, there is a greater risk that any pests they carry could establish themselves and spread after planting.

## Addressing risks presents a highly complex task

Seed companies often operate breeding programmes in multiple countries so they can produce more than one crop each season. These seeds are then shipped to all corners of the globe for cleaning, treating, testing, and packaging prior to being sold and shipped again - sometimes after being in storage for long periods of time. Their final destination may not be known at the time of export from the country of origin.

All of this makes it very difficult - if not impossible - to take into account all possible phytosanitary import requirements of the countries that will eventually import the seeds.

By proposing standard approaches to risk assessment and testing, the new standard will help harmonise how countries deal with the complexities of the international seed trade, thereby facilitating trade in seeds - valued at some \$12 billion annually - while ensuring such shipments safeguard food supplies for a growing global population.

## **Protecting plants vital to feeding a hungry world**

FAO recognises that the IPPC's work is vital to achieving the world's Sustainable Development Goals. Protecting the health of the world's plants requires sustainable agriculture, climate change resilience, biodiversity protection, and the facilitation of safe trade.

"Because the IPPC is the only organisation to set government-recognised plant health standards that facilitate international trade, the decisions made here will be essential to further protect the world's plant resources, the very foundation of life," said Kundhavi Kadiresan, FAO assistant director-general and regional representative for Asia and the Pacific. "Indeed, FAO's vision of a world without hunger can only be accomplished with healthy plants that are free from regulated pests."

"These standards, which are built on consensus, are the most effective way to prevent the introduction and spread of plant pests to new environments, and avoid devastating impacts on plants as well as biodiversity, food security, and trade," said Jingyuan Xia, IPPC secretary.

The CPM further considered guidelines for an import regulatory system and a series of treatments that stop pests from burrowing into wooden packaging materials and methods to stop fruit flies from attacking citrus fruits. The Commission is also seeking approval for its proposal that 2020 be formally recognised as International Year of Plant Health, after a draft resolution for IYPH 2020 was approved by the FAO Council.

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