



AFSTA E-REVIEW

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AFSTA Congress in South Africa: 26 years of dedication and new perspectives towards excellence

By Dr. Yacouba Dialloul | AFSTA Secretary General | yacouba@afsta.org

The 2026 AFSTA Congress which opens in Cape Town, South Africa on 23rd March, 2026, comes hot on the heels of our 25th anniversary celebrated in Kigali in March 2025.

This milestone presents a valuable opportunity to reflect on AFSTA's contributions and achievements over the past quarter-century in advancing the seed industry on the continent.

The AFSTA Congress is that event that brings together seed industry players, regulators, scientists, and experts from various fields to discuss the critical importance and pivotal role of certified seed in ensuring food security to Africa.

Cape Town, the hosting city of the 2026 Congress is renowned for its seaport, the natural beauty of the Cape Floristic Region, and landmarks such as Table Mountain and Cape Point. In 2014, Cape Town was recognized as the world's top travel destination by The New York Times and

was also ranked as the number one destination by The Daily Telegraph in 2016 and 2023.

In addition to the Seed Business Networking, the 2026 Congress will provide a special focus on the latest developments in seed technology and innovations. It will feature a series of keynotes and breakout sessions, and panel discussions from leading figures in the field, who will explore the impact of seed breeding and the utilization of Artificial Intelligence in enhancing seed production.

The Cape Town congress, scheduled to take place from 23-25 March 2026 will emphasize among other interesting topics, the cross-border movement of quality seed, market access, the necessity for interdisciplinary approaches to address climate change in agriculture, and the significance of harmonizing seed policies and regulations. The congress will provide a technical platform for knowledge sharing and exchange of

ideas among seed company leaders, policymakers, researchers, farmers, development partners and other service providers along the seed value chain.

Why a hold seed congress in South Africa? The country leads the seed industry on the continent. Over the past 100 years, the South African seed industry has evolved from a major contributor of seed production into a highly competitive, dynamic industry.

The country's seed industry is a well-established and regulated sector playing a vital role in the agricultural landscape. It has evolved over more than a century, with significant specialization

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AFSTA
2026 Congress
23 - 25 MARCH
CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA



The Chairman of SANSOR, Dr Matome Ramakgapa captured at the handover ceremony in Kigali. The 2026 Congress in Cape Town will provide a special focus on the latest developments in seed technology and innovations.

by crop and the presence of more than 100 seed companies, including international companies with some of the leading players being Capstone Seeds, Corteva Agriscience, Syngenta Seed S.A. (Pty) Ltd, Sakata Seed Southern Africa (Pty) Ltd, Rijk Zwaan, and Bayer (Pty) Ltd.

The South Africa Seed Market size is estimated at USD 0.87 billion in 2025, and is projected to reach USD 1.06 billion by 2030, at a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 3.92% during the forecast period (2025-2030).

Organized in collaboration with the South African National Seed Organization (SANSOR), the Congress aims to bring together over 300 delegates from various sectors of the seed industry, including research and development, seed testing, production, and distribution. By leveraging of both AFSTA and SANSOR experience in congress

organization, the 2026 AFSTA Congress will be a momentum to celebrating excellence.

The innovation of the congress organization and setting, achieved by contracting a Professional Event Organizer, will contribute to ensuring the event's success and creating a compelling value proposition for delegates to participate in and celebrate the African Seed Congress's excellence.

Below is a tailored value proposition that highlights the benefits and opportunities for delegates attending the Congress in Cape Town:

1. Be part of a prestigious event that celebrates the achievements and advancements in African agriculture, showcasing a delegate's commitment to excellence.
2. Expand professional network and establish business partnerships that can drive innovation and growth in the seed business.
3. Participate in interactive workshops, panels, field tours and talk shows to share and enhance your expertise in seed science and agricultural development.
4. Engage with fellow African and global leaders in seed and agriculture, scientists and policymakers to promote collaboration.
5. Gain exclusive access to the latest research and insights on plant breeding innovation, seed technology, crop enhancement and sustainable farming practices.
6. Engage with policymakers and seed regulators to influence the development and or shape of policies that support the growth and innovation of the seed sector.
7. Engage with the media by collaborating with the press and sharing accomplishments and future plans, thereby reaching a wider audience and enhancing each delegate's reputation.
8. Post articles and advertisements in the African Seed Magazine 2026
9. Showcase or exhibit your products in the high value limited booths available at the Congress
10. Attend exciting social events, including a golf tournament, welcome cocktail and gala dinner.

Join us in Cape Town, South Africa and seize this opportunity to advance the future of Africa's seed industry through groundbreaking collaboration, interactive and engaging technical sessions, business opportunities, research insights and perspectives.

CALL FOR ARTICLES

The African Seed Traders Association (AFSTA) invites articles from seed people for its 12th edition of The African Seed Magazine due to be published in March 2026.

AFSTA calls for in-depth pieces on any initiative or news in your country on seed trade and seed production initiatives, policy, projects that have a direct impact on the African seed sector.

Kindly note that AFSTA being a neutral body, only publishes articles which do not promote one company's work. However joint efforts by a consortium of companies will be published. **Deadline for submission is 30th September 2025.**



AFSTA calls on seed companies to popularize COMESA Seed variety catalogue

By Aghan Daniel Idaghan@afsta.org

At the invitation of Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the African Seed Trade Association (AFSTA) joined representatives of 19 National Seed Authorities (NSAs) and the private sector gathered in Nairobi to discuss the status of the COMSHIP program with special attention being given to COMESA Seed variety Catalogue.

AFSTA), was represented in the meeting by this writer and Lynet Ngila, a board member. During the meeting, AFSTA said that to promote and popularize the varieties on the Catalogue, there is need for continuous awareness creation and launching of centers of excellence within the National Seed Trade Associations to showcase the varieties at the country level.

"Seed companies need to embrace the seed labels and the COMESA certificates to enable them trade in Africa and reach wider markets that they have not been able to penetrate. COMESA should hence work with national seed authorities to realize proper harmonization to ease promotion of COMSHIP. As AFSTA we are supportive of COMSHIP and we remain a strategic partner to COMESA in the harmonization of seed laws in Africa," noted Ms Ngila on behalf of the AFSTA Board. The COMESA Seed Certification

Scheme, implemented through COMSHIP, aims to harmonize trade in certified seed within the COMESA region by having a common label and certification system to ensure quality and to facilitate regional seed trade.

During the meeting held on **May 20 - 21, 2025** a presentation on the collection and analysis of seed variety data for COMESA Seed Information System (COMSIS), presented by Bruce Chulu Simbunji from Zambia noted that out of 104 seed varieties registered and listed in the catalogue, 79 were maize, Soyabeans had 8 with wheat coming third with 3.

Kenya had the highest number of varieties followed by Burundi and Zambia.

"We have a big problem in terms of seed availability. We lack seed for some crops and from the COMSHIP study, it is only Zambia that had certified seed available. The rest of the countries had a deficit. The most traded crop is maize as most companies are involved in seed production and trade," said Chulu.

Inadequate data, the report noted together with data discrepancies and lack of an online database were major challenges encountered by the seed sector.

"Despite progress, challenges persist. Uneven level of policy alignments across neighbour states, insignificant public awareness of harmonized procedures including low adoption of the

COMSHIP framework, delays in mutual recognitions of seed certification and limited financing for harmonization" added Dr Alice Murage from KALRO.

Ibrahim Shiundu, Advanta seed added, "Getting seed production availability information in Africa is not easy. The challenges are too much, some is because the data is not available, some are trade secrets especially among seed companies, they may not want to declare".

Looking ahead, the government of Kenya is committed to strengthen national implementation, aligning our national seed policies and practices with COMESA regulations and fully operationalize the COMESA Variety Catalogue.

"On private sector engagement, Kenya is committed to creating an enabling environment or private sector to thrive especially in seed research, production and distribution. On digital innovation we will scale up digital platforms for seed certification, inspection and farmer access," said Dr Murage.

"COMESA needs to ensure they come up with a data base and online platform where more information can be put together and find a way member states can have access for them to make any business decisions," Chulu cited.

Digital tool to aid agronomic trial management now available for seed companies

By Aghan Daniel I daghan@afsta.org



AFSTA member, EA Seed's Honumanthappa, Chief Operating Officer at Syava Seed (U) Ltd (East African Seed) is all ears to an official of AgriEdge on the sidelines of ACAT as she explains how their digital tool 'TrialEdge' can seed companies obtain real time and accurate data.

A Moroccan agricultural technology company, AgriEdge, has designed a digital tool that makes agronomic trial management services for seed companies a walk in the park.

The technology 'TrialEdge' centralized data management of field agronomic trials by offering an all-in-one platform.

Speaking to AFSTA at the African Conference on Agricultural Technologies in Kigali Rwanda,

the Agritech project manager at AgriEdge Rim Salhi mentioned that the digital tool helps seed companies in getting real time and accurate data as they can monitor trials across multiple locations.

"The Trial Edge tool is a great solution for seed companies as it helps them manage their trial data in a better way as they are able to centralize their seed information and be able to see all the data they have keyed in the trials," Salhi explained adding that

the technology also enables seed companies get better analysis and better reporting in good time as it serves as a 'Data Warehouse' for the entire organization.

"At AgriEdge, we believe solutions should grow from the ground up. Since 2017, we have worked hand in hand with farmers to co-create simple, practical tools that respond to real, on-the-ground needs for agriculture," said CEO, Mr. Faissal Sehbaoui.

Agronomic trials are essential for agriculture, providing crucial data to evaluate new crop varieties, fertilizers, phytosanitary treatments, and other agricultural practices. However, managing trials can be complex and time-consuming.

Besides the Trial Edge product, the company offers other Artificial Intelligence technologies that support small scale farmers as well as their commercial counterparts to produce more yields and optimize their resources such as fertilizers.

"We have developed many more AI tool solutions to help farmers produce more. Our complete ecosystem of digital solution covers: Fertilization performance, Precision irrigation, Agronomic trials, Drone spraying, Yield forecasting and carbon footprint tracking and reduction," said Salhi.

Agricultural Technology in Africa: New resolutions seek to transform farming in the region

By Aghan Daniel | daghan@afsta.org



Delegates at the conference held in Kigali from June 9 to 12. They agreed to foster networking, mentorship and investments in African institutions that offer internships, skill coaching and youth mentorship.

The second edition of the African Conference on Agricultural Technologies (ACAT) concluded on 12th June 2025 in Kigali, Rwanda, with strong resolutions to advance agricultural technology in the region.

Convened by the Rwandan Government, the African Agriculture Technology Foundation (AATF), and its partners in Kigali, Rwanda, the conference adopted a declaration known as the Kigali Declaration.

This is a set of actionable commitments to scale up the adoption of agricultural

technologies, strengthen regulatory frameworks, and enhance youth and private sector involvement across Africa's food systems.

AFSTA was represented in the four-day event by this writer.

The Declaration, adopted during a ministerial meeting on the sidelines of the conference, emphasized enhanced public budget allocations towards agricultural technologies related to rural infrastructure development and agricultural training at public universities.

It called for catalyzing and fostering multi-sectoral collaborations to drive participatory and co-creation

initiatives between different stakeholders. These include public sector, research institutions, civil society, the private sector and farming communities.

The Declaration also called for advancing regional harmonization and alignment of national aspirations with continental blueprints and creating an enabling environment to drive agricultural technology commercialization.

Additionally, it looked at ensuring equitable access to agro-inputs and climate smart innovations, adequate extension, and long-term food security as well as mainstreaming the youth, women, and rural farmers in government policies and strategies.

Besides the Declaration, the ACAT conference recognized the youth as a strong force that is driving the development and adoption of agricultural technology in Africa. Thus, the participants committed to adopt youth empowerment, mentorship, linkages with investors and recognition of youth innovations as integral components of ACAT.

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The attendees also committed to adopt youth empowerment, mentorship, linkages with investors and recognition of youth innovations as integral components of the conference whose next edition will be held in Nairobi in 2027.

They agreed to advocate for the development of youth – friendly policies and call upon governments and partners to invest in youth-focused agri-innovations, enable their access to finances and knowledge sharing from researchers.

They also agreed to foster networking, mentorship and investments in African institutions that offer internships, skill coaching and youth mentorship.

Further, the participants agreed to develop an intentional action plan for eliminating challenges on last mile delivery of agricultural technologies to young farmers, promoting youth-led innovative solutions, while promoting youth programmes in between ACAT editions.

Running from 9th-12th June, 2025, under the theme 'NextGen Ag-Tech Solutions for Africa's Farmers' the conference explored promising

opportunities for driving agricultural transformation paying special attention on innovative agricultural technology solutions tailored to the needs of African smallholder farmers.

The conference brought together over 700 participants drawn from 35 countries consisting government officials from Rwanda, representatives of six African governments, youths, farmers, researchers, private sector and industry experts.

The inaugural ACAT 2023 held in Nairobi, Kenya resulted in significant commitments and partnerships which have contributed to substantial advancements in scaling improved and climate-smart crop varieties and agro-processing innovations that have enhanced crop productivity and improved farmers' livelihoods in the continent.

The next ACAT will be held in 2027 in Nairobi to take stock of progress made on the 2025 ACAT commitments.

Hope for farmers as outfit launches virtual agronomist

By Aghan Daniel I daghan@afsta.org

African farmers have long suffered from few, if any agricultural extension officers which have made it difficult to confront food insecurity and climate challenges.

For instance, Kenya last employed a large number of agriculture extension workers in 2006. Before that, they had been last recruited in 1986. This means that in the next 5 years, over 50% of current extension workers will be retiring. The story is almost the same in other parts of Africa. The ratio of extension workers to the farmer is at best 1:1000 nationally while Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) recommends a ratio of 1: 400 farmers.

Amidst a background of scanty technical support to them, farmers are starved from information drought on the best farming practices, how to maximize yields, ensure better crop varieties and anything that will enhance their farming fortunes.

While representing African Seed Trade Association at the 2025 African Conference of Agricultural Technologies (ACAT) in Kigali we caught up with Abigail Wairimu, a data scientist at International Solutions for Decision Agriculture (ISDA).

Amidst this gap, ISDA has invented Virtual Agronomist, an Artificial Intelligence Assistant tool developed by International Solutions for Decision Agriculture (ISDA) to provide expert agronomic advice to farmers thereby boosting their productivity.

"The virtual agronomist ensures farmers get tailored recommendations on soil health, advice on fertilizer use and pest control throughout the season from planting to harvesting.

This helps farmers to maximize their production," Wairimu explained.

The Virtual agronomist AI was introduced to farmers two years ago and has led to over 50% yield increase in crop production, benefiting 250,000 farmers who have adopted its use across various African countries.

In Kenya the virtual agronomist tool



Abigail Wairimu, a data scientist at International Solutions for Decision Agriculture (ISDA) says the virtual agronomist tool is in use in Kenya, Uganda Malawi and Zambia.

is being used by maize farmers in Kericho, rice farmers in Mwea Tebere irrigation scheme and in Uganda it is being used in Bulambuli. Ghana, Malawi and Zambia have also embraced the technology, and the results are very impressive.

"A number of farmers in Africa have embraced the virtual agronomist technology and we hope that in the next 5 years we will reach 5 million farmers, and every farmer will have access to a virtual agronomist at their disposal at any time of the season," said Wairimu.

The technology has helped farmers increase their yields. A farmer group in Uganda, says ISDA reported an increase of about 66% and in Kenya farmers in Mwea reduced the budget spent on fertilizer purchase because of better targeted fertilizer recommendations by the virtual agronomist.

The farmer Assistant AI is user friendly, and farmers only need to have smart phone and be conversant with the use of WhatsApp.

"To start using the Artificial Intelligence too, a farmer needs to save a specific number of people in their phone, the virtual agronomist will then provide guidance through the process. A farmer only need to share their field equation and the virtual agronomist will present a report indicating the soil status (NPK-nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium) and the PH then give a tailored fertilizer recommendation and proper use," she explained.

One may ask, is Virtual Agronomist AI similar to other AI tools like ChatGPT that generates content?

Wairimu explains that that the virtual agronomist tool is not similar to other AI tools as it has been designed together with other scientific models designed by agronomists and scientists.

"Virtual agronomist has local agronomic knowledge that other tools like ChatGPT do not have, recommendations given by virtual agronomists would be similar to that of an agronomist, soil scientist or researcher," Wairimu clarified.

Seed companies to benefit from digitized advisories services using weather data

By Christine Ochogo I christawine@yahoo.com



Mr. Ronald Diang's, Regional programme coordinator at TomorrowNow says that his outfit empowers farmers by providing timely localized agricultural advice through emerging technologies.

Agriculture is the backbone of many economies and a crucial source of food security.

Supporting small holder farmers with timely information and education can lead to more resilient agriculture practices and stronger rural economies.

For this reason, TomorrowNow, a data driven organization supported by Gates Foundation, is stepping in to empower farmers by providing timely localized agricultural advice through emerging technologies.

"At TomorrowNow we are excited on seeing how best to support small holder farmers to make better decisions on their farms. These decisions include the suitable

time to plant, apply fertilizer and scout for pests. We do this by leveraging on new technologies coming into Africa. We then localize these technical technologies for African farmers by translating them into insights that can be able to make the farmer optimally make wise decision," says Ronald Diang's the organization's Regional Programme Coordinator.

While at the African Conference on Agricultural Technologies, ACAT 2025 in Kigali Rwanda, Mr Diang's explained that they are partnering with various government organizations in providing digitized advisories services to farmers using climate and weather data.

"We are happy to work with the Kenya Meteorological Department and KALRO to provide advisory services to about 5.1 million farmers in Kenya. These farmers receive information on the Short Message Service (SMS), a weekly update depending on the time that they planted, the crop that they grow and the area in which they are growing these crops. These advisories are very targeted on the growth stage and specific to the farmer and their location," Diang's explained.

Mr Diang's indicated that the information they provide benefit farmers, plant breeders and seed companies.

"There is great opportunity for those involved in seed breeding initiatives or crop model initiatives because what we have built through global access platform is giving

you access to open-source high resolution climate and weather data," he added.

Through the global access platform, one can access 12-year real analysis data set, short time forecast, that is localized for the East African market, and this can improve breeding outcome and also improve fundamentally the outputs of different crop models.

To effectively serve the farming fraternity, Diang's says there is need for massive ground observation data in gathering high impact data which can be achieved through partnerships and working closely with research organizations.

"We need a lot of ground observation data and getting access to some of these very quality ground observation points and this is where the power of partnership comes in. We have partnered with the Trans-African Hydro-Meteorological Observatory (TAHMO) organization that has helped us access 22 stations across Africa. Other research organizations like CGIAR and a number of partners who help us validate some of these weather data we are developing," Diang's added.

This initiative goes along with achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 2 which aims to end hunger, achieve food security and improve nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture by 2030.



Kenyan government reaffirms support for GMOs

By Aghan Daniel | Communication Officer | daghan@afsta.org

Amid several court cases which have derailed uptake of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), the Kenyan Government has reiterated its support for this technology to improve food security.

"It is important to note that the government appreciates the use of modern biotechnology as a powerful tool that can support its agenda of improving productivity across value chains and at the same time building resilience to the effects of climate change," said Mutahi Kagwe, Agriculture Cabinet Secretary in a speech read on his behalf during the 13th annual Biosafety conference in Naivasha by Secretary Administration, Rashid Khator.

Referring to the Cabinet's 2022 decision to lift the decade long ban on the cultivation and importation of GM crops and animal feeds, Kagwe noted that the decision was consistent with the findings of various studies that determined that there are robust policy, legal, regulatory institutional structures in Kenya to ensure responsible and safe applications of modern biotechnologies.

"This decision aimed to address food security challenges exacerbated by prolonged droughts and to enhance agricultural productivity through biotechnology," he said. Besides, Kagwe assured the National Biosafety Authority (NBA) that discussions are ongoing to have it remain as a distinct entity due to its unique



Participants follow proceedings during the 13th annual national biosafety conference in Naivasha that was officially opened by Secretary Administration at the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development Mr. Rashid Khator who represented Agriculture Cabinet Secretary Hon. Mutahi Kagwe

and specialized mandate despite the ongoing re-organization of State Corporations.

He emphasized that the Authority was designated by the Government as the National Focal Point to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, the global biosafety regulatory framework under the Convention on Biological Diversity.

"This is to enable Kenya to be a key participant in the global biotechnology enterprise, as envisioned in the National Biotechnology Development Policy of 2006. Because of the international obligations and the need to have a dedicated agency to assess the safety of GMOs and other emerging biotechnologies, we are having discussions so that NBA remains a distinct entity due to its unique and specialized

mandate," Kagwe stated.

The forum attracted experts, government officers, scholars, policy makers, researchers' experts, farmers and youth representatives aims to take stock of the achievements and challenges in embracing modern biotechnology in the Country.

The conference that the NBA has religiously organized for the last 13 years aims to promote public awareness and education on biosafety matters and discuss new developments in biotechnology and biosafety, as mandated by the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety and the Biosafety Act.

"This year's theme: "13 years later: Building trust and ensuring safety of Genetically Modified Organisms" resonates well with the government's commitment

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to facilitate adoption of new technologies and innovations to transform low agricultural productivity in the country," Kagwe noted.

He disclosed that his Ministry will continue to support efforts to strengthen the Authority's regulatory capacity on GMOs through budgetary support and assured Kenyans that the government has put in place a robust biosafety regulatory and institutional framework through the National Biotechnology

Development Policy, the Biosafety Act and Regulations to ensure safe development, handling and transfer of GMOs.

Hussein Mohamed, NBA's Board member, revealed that the agency has approved some policies and manuals among them; labelling of GMOs, Genome editing, appointment of Biosafety Inspectors, asset management and liability, risk management, Data Protection and ICT policy, all aimed at enabling it to fulfil its mandate as provided in the law.

Nehemiah Ngetich, NBA's Acting Chief Executive Officer, underscored that the Authority is here to ensure the fast tracking and adoption of all biotechnological advancements, adding that they have embarked on public awareness campaigns across the country to sensitize Kenyans on the Authority's role as a regulator of GMOs.

AFSTA explores partnership opportunities with CABI as the latter unveils its new strategic plan

By Catherine Langat | Technical Manager | catherine@afsta.org

The Centre for Agriculture and Biosciences International (CABI) convened its Africa Regional Consultation Meeting in Nairobi under the banner "Working in Partnership for a Safe and Sustainable Future."

The event which took place from June 9 to 13, brought together representatives from CABI member states, intergovernmental bodies, research organizations, the private seed sector represented by AFSTA, and technical experts to reflect on emerging agricultural priorities in Africa and shape collaborative action going forward on pest risk reduction.

AFSTA was invited as a strategic partner, recognizing its continental leadership in advancing seed trade, phytosanitary & plant health compliance, and private sector engagement across Africa's

agricultural input systems.

The meeting was officially opened by Hon. Mutahi Kagwe, Cabinet Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development, Kenya, who emphasized the growing urgency of strengthening agricultural science, regulation, and partnerships to ensure sustainable, resilient food systems in Africa.

CABI CEO, Daniel Elger, delivered welcome remarks outlining CABI's commitment to practical science, local solutions, and inclusive partnerships that empower countries to meet shared food security and sustainability goals through pesticide risk reduction. AFSTA's participation highlighted the potential for collaboration in plant health, digital agriculture, and regulatory alignment.

In addition, the meeting discussed challenges and opportunities for implementing pesticide risk reduction practices, including inadequate regulatory enforcement, knowledge gaps, and barriers to adoption of safer alternatives.

AFSTA emphasized the importance of integrating pesticide safety into seed production protocols and harmonizing phytosanitary and pesticide regulation to facilitate seed trade.

The partnership between CABI and AFSTA can support joint capacity building initiatives, national policy dialogues, and projects on seed certification and plant health risk reduction. The collaboration can also promote ecological sustainability, including biological pest control and reduced chemical dependency.





AFSTA to support implementation of COMESA Regional Seed Certification and Labelling System

By Dr Yacouba Diallo | AFSTA Secretary General | yacouba@afsta.org



Participants at the launch of the regional seed certification and labeling system

Lusaka, Zambia - The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) has officially inaugurated a regional seed certification and labeling system that will facilitate movement of high-quality seeds across borders through establishment of a standardized labeling and verification system.

The system also intends to combat counterfeit seeds, strengthen intra-regional seed trade and enhance farmers' access to high-quality, certified seeds across 21 member countries, thereby benefiting approximately 90 million farmers. The program aims to harmonize seed regulations, facilitating increased intra-trade and improving seed accessibility.

The launch took place during a meeting held, in Lusaka, Zambia from June 25 to 26, 2025. It was attended by more than 40 key stakeholders from COMESA member states,

seed regulators, National Plant Protection Organizations (NPPOs) representatives, seed companies, National seed trade Associations, COMESA, and Alliance for Commodity Trade in Eastern and Southern Africa (ACTESA) staff.

This writer represented the African Seed Trade Association (AFSTA). The apex seed association pledged its support to this initiative by engaging in awareness creation and capacity-building activities aimed at facilitating smooth adoption and implementation of the system.

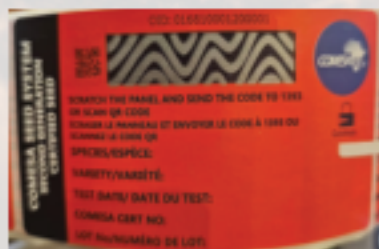
"The COMESA regional certificates and labels are poised to expedite the seed export and imports by the COMESA Member States, thereby facilitating the seamless flow of seeds in the region," said Dr. John Mukuka, the Chief Executive Officer of ACTESA in his opening remarks. The launching ceremony was presided over by Dr. Kenneth Msiska,

Director of Plant Quarantine and Phytosanitary Services in Zambia's Ministry of Agriculture.

The main goal of ACTESA, formed in September 2008, is to increase farmer productivity and incomes in the Eastern and Southern Africa region through trade in strategic agricultural commodities.

With the new system, seed consignments are expected to move more freely across borders and within countries, using special COMESA-designed seed labels. These labels are issued for 1kg, 5kg, and 25kg bags as part of bulk certified seed lots. The initiative is built upon the COMESA SeedTrade Harmonization Regulations, which were approved in 2014. It aims to ensure that high-quality seeds can be traded easily and align with the African Continental Free Trade Area's (AfCFTA) broader plans for African harmonization. In addition, the COMESA Variety Catalogue, which lists varieties registered in at least two COMESA member states following harmonized procedures, will also facilitate regional trade by eliminating the need for further testing.

The initiative is supported by The European Union under the global framework of enhancing regional integration, facilitating trade, and strengthening regional institutions.



Sample COMESA Seed Label

Beyond the tuber: How Solynta is planting a new future for the African potato

By Dr. Yacouba Diallo | Secretary General | yacouba@afsta.org

The future of potato farming is sprouting in Kenya. Dr. Yacouba Diallo, AFSTA Secretary General, and Charles Nyachae recently visited Solynta's impressive demo trials at Molly Farm in Limuru, Kenya. Under the invitation of Mr. Charles Miller, Solynta's Director of Strategic Alliances and Development and AFSTA Board Member, the AFSTA team witnessed firsthand the pioneering Hybrid True Potato Seed (HTPS) technology.

Solynta, an esteemed international seed Company and a member of the African Seed Trade Association (AFSTA), is advancing African agriculture significantly through its innovative hybrid potato seed technology.

The field visit by the AFSTA Secretariat to Solynta's demo trials provided an excellent opportunity to observe the innovative solutions this company offers to African farmers by promoting the Hybrid True Potato Seeds.



AFSTA Team at Miango Farm, where Solynta's True potato seed is grown

Shifting from Traditional bulky tubers, Solynta's technology enables farmers to grow potatoes from actual seeds rather than perishable, and often disease-prone, potato tubers traditionally used for planting. With just 25 grams of Solynta's hybrid true potato seeds, the farmer can plant one hectare, which traditionally requires more than 2,500 kg of seed tubers. In addition, this technology in potato planting material

drastically reduces transport costs, storage needs, and the risk of pest and disease transmissions.

The demo plots showcased that Solynta's potato seed technology demonstrates strong genetic resistance to key diseases such as late blight. The team saw firsthand how Solynta's new varieties are often more resilient than traditional types grown side by side, requiring fewer or no chemical sprays due to their improved disease resistance. This genetic resistance results in a significant reduction in fungicide use, enabling farmers to cut costs and adopt more



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sustainable farming practices.

The field trials visited demonstrate significant yield increases with Solynta's new varieties, which are grown alongside local standard varieties to enable direct comparison of their performance, yield, and disease resistance.

Solynta is currently collaborating with AFSTA member companies across multiple African countries, including Bayer and ETG among others Kenya. This field day provided an opportunity to observe how Solynta collaborates with local small-scale farmers in the potato value chain, such as Mlango Farm in Ngecha village.

Their partnership empowers smallholder farmers with training on best agronomic practices, ensuring they maximize the benefits of this game-changing technology.

Besides seed companies, Solynta works with the National Potato



Coated (L) and Uncoated (R)
Solynta Hybrid True Potato Seed

Solynta's new varieties are often more resilient than traditional types

Council of Kenya (NPCK) and the Kenya Plant Health Inspectorate Service (KEPHIS) to ensure industry regulations facilitate the timely adoption of their innovations.

In summary, visiting Solynta's demo trials gave a clear understanding of how this AFSTA member company uses advanced hybrid breeding technology to transform potato cultivation in Africa. They provide practical and sustainable solutions that enhance farmers' livelihoods and support food security. This technology is particularly beneficial for smallholder farmers due to its ease of transport and storage, as well as the potential for higher and more reliable yields, which contribute to enhanced profitability and improved livelihoods.

Solynta Hybrid True Potato Seeds (HTPS): Small seeds, indeed, but making a big difference!



Supporting Uganda in the revision of the Uganda Seed Strategy

By AFSTA Secretariat | afsta@afsta.org



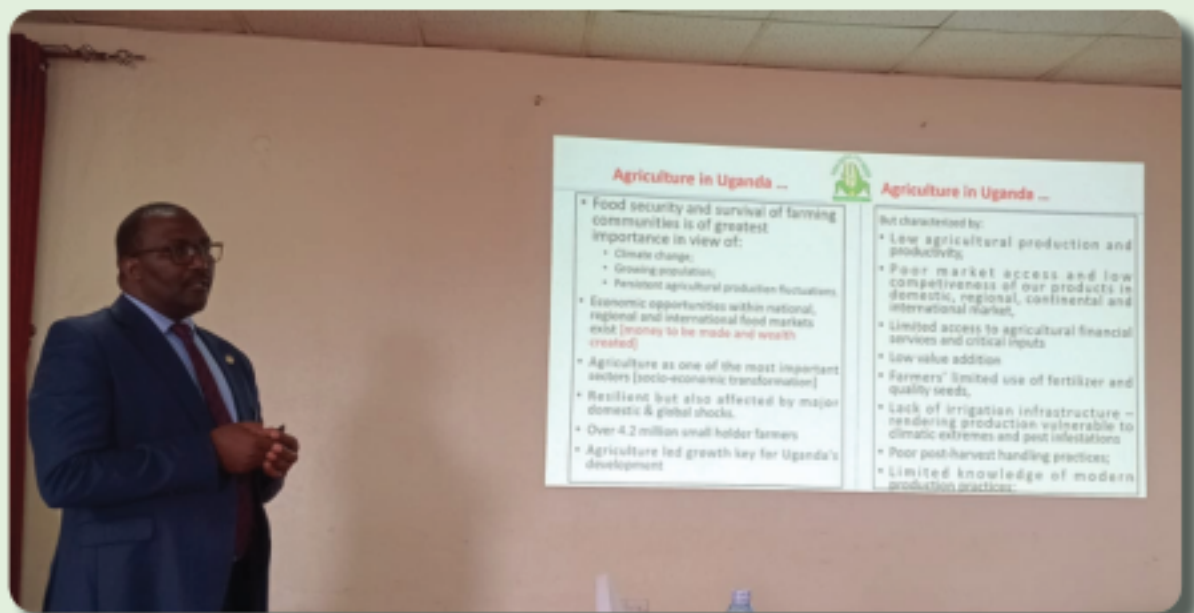
Technical committee members during the review and revision of the Uganda National Seed Strategy

AFSTA supported the Uganda Seed Trade Association (USTA) in revising the national seed strategy of Uganda. The Uganda Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF) developed the National Seed Strategy for Uganda, which ran from 2018/19 to 2022/23. The Strategy has expired, and MAAIF intends to review the status of the Strategy's implementation and develop a new/ revised Seed Strategy for the sector, which will run from 2026 to 2030. MAAIF

constituted technical Committee meetings to oversee the review and revision of the Uganda Seed Strategy. The Technical Committee convened its meetings in Kampala, Uganda, between 17th and 20th June 2025, with financial support from AFSTA (under the AFSTA-Bayer agreement), in collaboration with the Uganda Seed Trade Association (USTA). The meeting followed a previous Technical Committee meeting, which was convened as an expanded meeting to target representations from

three stakeholder categories: research institutions (NARO and Uganda Christian University), seed companies (NASECO, FICA, SYOVA Seed, and Sterling Seed), and QDS producer groups. Moreover, the policy meeting was also intended to seek guidance from two policy-making Institutions in Uganda on how best to advance the seed strategy to the point of government endorsement and approval for Implementation. Highlights from the meeting include.





AFSTA Board Member & USTA Chairman, Mr. Narcis Tumushabe, at the Uganda seed strategy revision workshop

Agriculture in Uganda ...

- Food security and survival of farming communities is of greatest importance in view of:
 - Climate change;
 - Growing population;
 - Persistent agricultural production fluctuations
- Economic opportunities within national, regional and international food markets exist (money to be made and wealth created)
- Agriculture as one of the most important sectors (socio-economic transformation)
- Resilient but also affected by major domestic & global shocks.
- Over 4.2 million small holder farmers
- Agriculture led growth key for Uganda's development

Agriculture in Uganda ...

but characterized by:

- Low agricultural production and productivity;
- Poor market access and low competitiveness of our products in domestic, regional, continental and international markets;
- Limited access to agricultural financial services and critical inputs
- Low value addition
- Farmers' limited use of fertilizer and quality seeds;
- Lack of irrigation infrastructure – rendering production vulnerable to climatic extremes and pest infestations
- Poor post-harvest handling practices;
- Limited knowledge of modern production practices.

- Strategic Policy Review: The meeting focused on updating Uganda's National Seed Strategy, a key policy document that governs seed sector development, regulation, trade, and innovation
- Inclusion of Regional Trade Elements: Emphasis was placed on aligning Uganda's seed laws with regional harmonized frameworks (e.g., COMESA Seed Trade Harmonization Protocol)
- Private Sector Engagement: The strategy revision process prioritized expanding the role of the private sector in seed production, certification, and distribution
- Strengthening Seed Quality Assurance Systems: Discussions addressed seed inspection, certification, labelling, and enforcement mechanisms to enhance seed quality in the domestic and regional market
- Integration with AfCFTA and CAADP: The revised strategy aimed to improve Uganda's readiness to engage in continental trade regimes, including AfCFTA, and align with CAADP objectives
- Adoption of Digital Tools: Proposed digitization of seed registration, traceability, and trade monitoring tools for greater transparency and efficiency
- Policy endorsement pathway: The main objective of the meetings was to determine how to guide the strategy toward formal government approval and implementation
- AFSTA's role as financial partner: AFSTA, in collaboration with USTA, financially supported the technical committee meeting, positioning itself as a strategic stakeholder in national seed policy development.
- As the next steps from the meeting, the following were noted.
- Review the input from the different institutions' presentations, especially the priority actions, lessons, and achievements, and improve the first draft of the Seed Strategy
- Finalize the evaluation of the last Seed Strategy, incorporating comments from presentations
- Highlight priorities/actions that are missing from the elapsed national Seed Strategy
- Alignment of the new national seed strategy with the Ugandan national development plan
- The commissioner, Department of Crop Inspection and Certification, would present the seed strategy to the top policy management in the ministry
- To conduct further stakeholder consultations on the new seed strategy.



African Cereal and Legume Breeding Consortium (ACLBC)



African Cereal and Legume Breeding Consortium

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CONNECTING CONTINENTS, CULTIVATING GROWTH FOR A
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- Awards & Recognition

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- 🌱 Strengthen India-Africa seed trade & research
- 🌾 Drive food security & agricultural resilience

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📅 DATE: 11TH – 13TH SEPTEMBER 2025

📍 VENUE: HYDERABAD, INDIA

🏠 HOSTS: AFSTA & INDIA CHAMBER OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE (ICFA)



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Cameroun / Cameroon

- SEMAGRI

Ghana

- Green-Ef Eco-Business Village Limited
- Village Ltd
- West Africa Centre for Crop Improvement, University of Ghana

UPCOMING EVENTS

1. AFSTA mid-term virtual Board Meeting: 29th July 2025
2. ACLBC Annual workshop and demo plot field visit: August 19th –20th 2025, Kenya
3. AVBC annual workshop 2025: 2nd - 4th September 2025: Arusha, Tanzania
4. ISTA Workshop on Purity and Other Seed Determination: 9th September 2025
5. Africa-India Seed Summit: 11th - 13th September 2025
6. AFSTA Board meeting: 15th - 16th October 2025: Nairobi, Kenya
7. World Congress of Agricultural Journalists: 15th - 18th Oct 2025, Nairobi, Kenya
8. Euroseeds2025 Congress 19th - 22nd October 2025: Edinburg, Scotland
9. Asian Seed Congress 2025: 17th - 21st November 2025, Mumbai, India
10. AFSTA Congress 2026: March 23rd - 25th 2026, Cape Town, South Africa

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