International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture

Subject Category: Biodiversity / Ecosystems

Type of Agreement / Instrument: Multilateral

Form: Legally-binding treaty

Status:
- Signed by Canada June 10, 2002
- Ratified by Canada June 10, 2002
- In force in Canada June 29, 2004
- In force internationally June 29, 2004
- Ongoing

Lead & Partner Departments:
Lead: Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada

For Further Information:
Web Links:
- ITPGRFA home page
- Text of ITPGRFA
- Plant Gene Resources of Canada

Contacts:
AAFC Enquiry Centre

Compendium Edition: October 2018

Plain Language Summary
Successful Canadian agriculture depends on continuously adapting crops to changing conditions by breeding new crop varieties with improved traits. These new traits are found in the genetic diversity of cultivated and wild plant varieties from sources around the world. For thousands of years, cultivated plants have been following humans and were moved across countries and continents. Humans all over the world have developed a tremendous variety of crops we eat and utilize today. Of concern is that this genetic diversity has decreased globally due to industrialization of agricultural production, urbanization, and other factors. The International Plant Treaty wants to ensure that we do not lose more of this diversity, that we can continue to exchange and use it internationally, and that we share benefits that are obtained from using this diversity with all that have contributed to its development over time.

Objective
The objectives of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA, or the Treaty) are the conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture (PGRFA) and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of their use in harmony with the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), for sustainable agriculture and food security. These objectives will be attained by coordinating all activities under this Treaty closely with other work done by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the Convention on Biological Diversity, and with national Canadian initiatives.

Key Elements
No country is self-sufficient in plant genetic resources. All depend on the genetic diversity of crops from other countries and regions. International cooperation and exchange of genetic resources are therefore essential for food security.

The key elements of the ITPGRFA are: the conservation, exploration, collection, characterization, evaluation and documentation of PGRFA; the Sustainable Use of Plant Genetic Resources; Farmers’
Facilitated access to millions of samples of PGRFA from Canada's participation in global crop genetic resources in Canadian gene banks. Canada preserves less than 2% of global crop genetic resources in Canadian gene banks.

**EXPECTED RESULTS**

PGRFA are the foundation of global food systems. The Treaty promotes a globally integrated approach to the exploration, conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA. It provides facilitated access to millions of samples of PGRFA from 144 countries through the Treaty’s MLS. The MLS covers 64 of the most important crops for global food security that together account for 80% of the food we derive from plants.

All countries are interdependent when it comes to PGRFA. Facilitated access to genetic resources is critical to ensure production stability, resiliency and long-term sustainability, protecting the ability to improve crop varieties and to respond to emerging threats to food security.

**CANADA’S INVOLVEMENT**

Effective implementation of this Treaty is vital for Canada. Most of Canada’s major crops originated elsewhere and great diversity in most of them is found in other countries. Canada preserves less than 2% of global crop genetic resources in Canadian gene banks.

Canada’s participation in the Treaty provides it with facilitated access to millions of samples of PGRFA from 144 countries through the Treaty’s MLS. The Treaty provides legal clarity and globally accepted terms for germplasm exchange, alleviating the earlier situation of “access chill”, when many countries were not sharing their PGRFA.

Canada’s laws are consistent with the ITPGRFA and it participates actively in all key elements of the Treaty. In particular, the Treaty ensures that plant breeders can access PGRFA under the management and control of the Government of Canada and in the public domain through the Multilateral System of Access and Benefit-sharing. Canada implements measures to share benefits derived from the use of PGRFA in accordance with the provisions of the Treaty.

The following Canadian federal gene bank collections holding public domain PGRFA under the management of the Government of Canada and in the public domain through the Multilateral System of Access and Benefit-sharing. Canada participates actively in all key elements of the Treaty. In particular, the Treaty ensures that plant breeders can access PGRFA under the management and control of the Government of Canada and in the public domain through the Multilateral System of Access and Benefit-sharing. Canada implements measures to share benefits derived from the use of PGRFA in accordance with the provisions of the Treaty.

In Canada, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) is the leading government agency in all dealings regarding the ITPGRFA. As most 144 countries that are Parties to the Treaty, Canada has nominated a National Focal Point to the Treaty.

**RESULTS / PROGRESS**

**Activities**

AAFC played a key leadership role in negotiating the Treaty and developing instruments for its implementation. Canada’s important role is well recognized in this international sphere, contributing to global capacity building and food security while ensuring Canada’s access to genetic resources for agriculture. The most recent Governing Body Meeting of the Treaty (GB-7) was held in October 2017.

Canada is also a member of the Working Group on the enhancement of the MLS, which works on both improved access and improved benefit sharing.

Canada participates in the the Ad hoc Technical Committee on Sustainable Use of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, which provides advice on: coordination of the Programme of Work on Sustainable Use of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture and Supporting Initiatives; cooperation with the CBD and other international processes and institutions in the field of sustainable use of PGRFA.
Canada is a member of the Compliance Committee, which promotes compliance with all the provisions of the International Treaty and addresses issues of non-compliance. Canada participates in the Scientific Advisory Committee on the Global Information System of Article 17 of the Treaty, which is developing and strengthening a global information system to facilitate the exchange of information based on existing information systems.

Canada participates in the recently established Ad-Hoc Technical Expert Group on Farmers' Rights based on Article 9 of the Treaty. This group ensures that farmers are actively participating in shaping the future of the PGRFA sector and looks at according activities in each country.

**Reports**

The Treaty web site provides an overview and links to many activities and all Treaty meeting reports.

**Results**

The ITPGRFA is now in its implementation phase. The Standard Material Transfer Agreement was developed and is being used for the exchange of PGRFA by Contracting Parties, including Canada, since 2008. Between 2008 and 2017, a total of 4.1 million samples of PGRFA were transferred globally among 179 countries using the SMTA and a total of 58,971 SMTAs were concluded.

To date, three successful project cycles have been implemented with investments from the Benefit-sharing Fund which seeks to support the conservation and use of plant genetic resources on a global scale through technology transfer, capacity building, high-impact projects and innovative partnerships involving farmers, plant breeders, civil society and other stakeholders. Reports from completed projects can be found at the Benefit-sharing Fund web site. The fourth project cycle was initiated in 2017.

Great progress has been made in defining the tasks of the Global Information System for PGRFA foreseen by Article 17 of the Treaty, which will facilitate the global access to information about the germplasm holdings in the MLS.

The Programme of Work on Sustainable Use of PGRFA exploring opportunities for a Joint Programme on Biodiversity in Agriculture for Sustainable Use of PGRFA.

The new group working on Farmers’ Rights is important because the situation of farmers differs greatly among the 144 countries that are Parties to the Treaty.