



COMPENDIUM OF CANADA'S ENGAGEMENT IN INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL AGREEMENTS AND INSTRUMENTS

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:

June 2022

PLAIN LANGUAGE SUMMARY

Sustainable Canadian agriculture depends on continuously adapting crops to changing conditions by breeding new crop varieties with improved traits. Climate change is a major factor that necessitates such adaptation. 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' Rights; a Multilateral System of Access and Benefit-sharing (MLS); and a Funding Strategy.

A multilateral international agreement for the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of genetic resources has for the first time been practically implemented through the Treaty and its [Multilateral System \(MLS\)](#).

The ITPGRFA Funding Strategy is composed of several elements, including: allocation of predictable and adequate resources by international bodies for the implementation of plans and programs promoted under the Treaty; national funding for national activities; the [Global Crop Diversity Trust](#), established in 2004; financial resources provided on a voluntary basis through bilateral, regional and multilateral channels; and the Treaty's Benefit-sharing Fund which receives contributions from governments, industry, foundations and non-governmental organizations, and monetary benefits arising from the use of genetic resources obtained using the Standard Material Transfer Agreement when accessing germplasm from the MLS. The Benefit-sharing Fund regularly has calls for proposals to support projects supporting farmers in developing countries to conserve crop diversity in their fields and assisting farmers and breeders to adapt crops to changing needs and demands.

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 148 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 148 countries through the Treaty's MLS. The Treaty provides legal clarity and globally accepted terms for germplasm exchange and benefit-sharing, 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 and control of Canada are included within the MLS: Plant Gene Resources of Canada, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan; Canadian Clonal Genebank, Harrow, Ontario; and Canadian Potato Genetic Resources, Fredericton, New Brunswick. These PGRFA are available under the terms of the Standard Material Transfer Agreement ("SMTA") of the Treaty. The Canadian gene banks provide samples of all PGRFA using the SMTA of the MLS.

In Canada, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) is the leading government agency in all dealings regarding the ITPGRFA. 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-8](#)) was held in November 2019.

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 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.

The Canadian Food Inspections Agency leads Canada's participation in the *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 2019, a total of 5.4 million samples of PGRFA were transferred globally to 181 countries using the SMTA and a total of 75,368 SMTAs were concluded.

Between 2013 and 2019, discussions and negotiations took place to enhance the Multilateral System (MLS) for access and benefit-sharing for plant genetic resources for food and agriculture by revising the SMTA and expand the list of 64 crops that are part of the Treaty's MLS (Annex I crops). The Governing Body of the ITPGRFA did not reach a consensus for the approval of a package of measures and these negotiations have

been suspended. To date, four 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 is exploring opportunities for a Joint Programme on Biodiversity in Agriculture for Sustainable Use of PGRFA.

The group working on Farmers' Rights is important for the implementation of the Treaty because farmers' needs differ greatly among the 148 countries that are contracting parties. [An inventory of national measures, best practices and lessons learned from the realization of Farmers' Rights](#) continues to be developed by this group. Based on this exercise, the group is developing a document with options for encouraging, guiding and promoting the realization of Farmers' Rights as set out in Article 9 of the Treaty.

The Treaty is implemented on harmony with the [Convention on Biological Diversity](#) and plays a key role in reaching the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) of the United Nations.