LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

asta | american seed trade association

www.betterseed.org

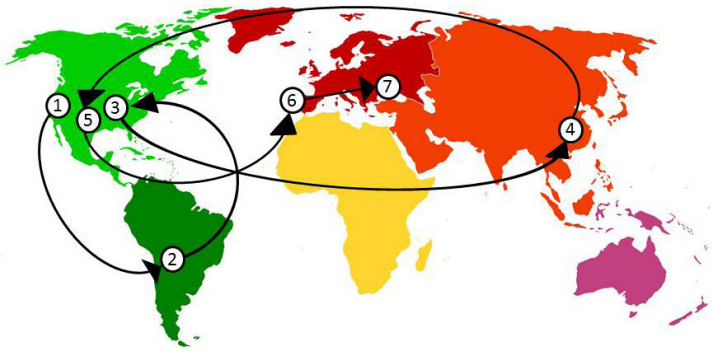
Founded in 1883, the American Seed Trade Association (ASTA) represents over 700 companies involved in seed production, plant breeding and related industries in North America. ASTA's broad membership offers varieties from alfalfa to zucchini and all production types including conventional, organic and biotech.

TRADE

In 2016, U.S. agriculture exports were $134.9 billion. The U.S. is both the largest market for seed in the world and the largest global exporter of seed, with seed exports reaching $1.7 billion. NAFTA countries alone account for $600 million in annual exports, making Mexico and Canada our two largest export markets.

Seed exports add approximately 4,800 jobs to the U.S. economy, while the industry's exports stimulate an additional $2.1 billion in business activity in addition to annual sales. (Based on USDA calculations)

TOMATO EXAMPLE

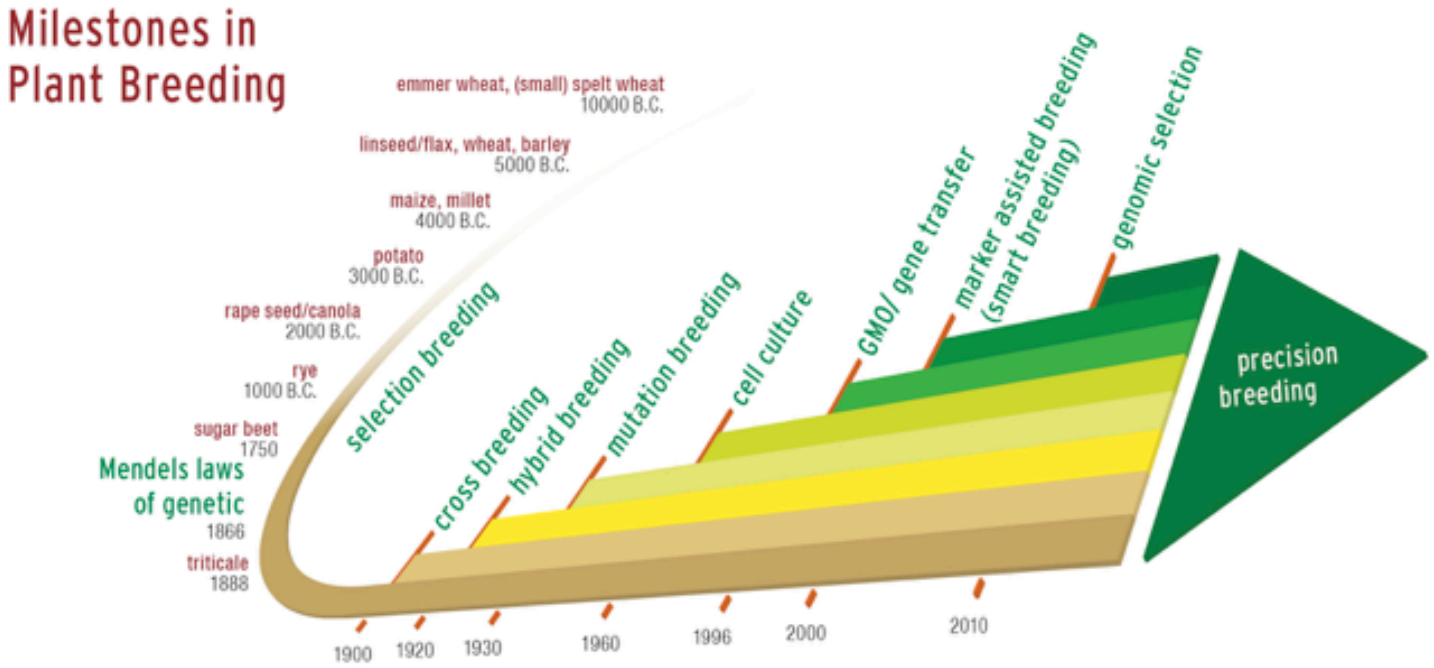


The U.S. comprises 26% of the global seed market because trading partners value the high-quality, consistent seed sold by U.S. exporters. Seed exports come from more than 40 different states with the largest being California ($532m), Oregon ($177m), Illinois ($98m), Texas ($93m), Idaho ($57m), Arizona ($56m), Michigan ($52m), and Iowa ($46m). Vegetables, grasses, corn and soybeans are the most commonly exported seeds.

Seed movement does not only involve trade in commercial seed. Seed movement across national borders is an integral part of variety development.

ASTA Position

ASTA supports a strong trade agenda. Eliminating tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade, promoting stronger intellectual property rights and harmonizing regulations are ASTA's top priorities for expanding global trade



INNOVATION IN PLANT BREEDING

Plant breeders have always strived to provide solutions. The continuous advancement in the understanding of plant genomes provides new opportunities to meet the challenges facing agriculture today and in the future.

In order to help ensure that U.S. agriculture remains at the forefront of innovation and maintains its leadership role globally, government policies should be predictable, science-and risk-based.

In January 2017, USDA published a proposed rule titled "Importation, Interstate Movement, and Release Into the Environment of Certain Genetically Engineered Organisms" to update its regulation of genetically engineered organisms under 7 CFR Part 340. The proposal recognizes that some applications of gene editing result in plant varieties that are essentially equivalent to varieties developed through more traditional breeding methods. These plant varieties would not be considered "genetically engineered organisms" and are thus excluded from USDA's pre-market regulatory review. The proposal makes the strong argument that these products have small genetic differences that can occur naturally or through long-standing breeding methods. ASTA and a wide number of agriculture organizations are supportive of this proposed policy.

It is critical that the regulatory process for new plant varieties is clear and predictable for researchers and industry. We encourage FDA, USDA and EPA to closely coordinate their activities to ensure consistent regulatory approach across the U.S. government. We also urge the U.S. government to engage with other countries to secure as much alignment in regulatory approaches as possible.

Small companies and universities have already begun to utilize gene editing tools in research projects. With the appropriate framework in place these projects can ultimately lead to new jobs and market opportunities along the entire food value chain. For more information on what plant breeding innovation can do for the future, visit ASTA's plant breeding innovation microsite.

VISIT OUR NEW SITE FOR PLANT BREEDING INNOVATION!

www.seedinginnovation.org

USDA-AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH SERVICE NATIONAL PLANT GERMPLASM SYSTEM

Seed researchers need a broad array of parent material, also known as plant genetic resources, from all corners of the globe to produce plant varieties for the diverse needs of farmers, consumers, the horticulture industry and conservationists. Such materials can be found in the USDA's National Plant Germplasm System (NPGS) which is housed within USDA's Agricultural Research Service. The NPGS collection is divided between 19 labs across the country with more than half a million samples of more than 15,000 different plant species.

It is one of the premier systems in the world but is currently funded at only $44 million per year. This amount is insufficient to collect, maintain and distribute the collections to U.S. researchers who are developing varieties for conventional and organic farmers and other landscape uses.

ASTA Position:
Increase funding for the NPGS so it can better fulfill its mission.

USDA-AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH SERVICE GERMPLASM ENHANCEMENT OF MAIZE

The Germplasm Enhancement of Maize (GEM) program within the funding for the ARS National Plant Germplasm System (NPGS) focuses on adapting exotic corn germplasm for use in the U.S. and on identifying useful genetics in exotic landraces to develop new hybrids.

Currently, U.S. corn production is based on predominantly two races of maize from more than 250 New World races. This limited genetic diversity renders the U.S. corn crop, and therefore, the global food supply, more vulnerable to attack by new diseases. GEM materials can play an important role in fighting new diseases both in the U.S. and globally.

GEM is a model public-private partnership between the federal government, universities, and companies of all sizes making significant research contributions and facilitating development of future researchers. ASTA supports an increase in GEM funding for both increased research and operations costs and the need to establish consistent winter nurseries for seed increases and regeneration.

ASTA Position:
Increase funding of the Germplasm Enhancement of Maize program from $1.6 million to $2.7 million.

USDA-NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE PLANT MATERIAL CENTERS

The network of 25 Plant Material Centers across the country seek out and test plants and plant technologies that restore and sustain healthy natural regional ecosystems. A key function of the centers is to evaluate plants for conservation traits and to make these materials available to commercial growers who provide plant materials to the public.

The materials developed by the Plant Material Centers are critical to many USDA goals including improving soil health, increasing pollinator and wildlife habitat and expanding the availability of new cover crop solutions. Nationwide, 500 of the 700 plant material centers' releases are currently under commercial production.

ASTA Position
The USDA-NRCS Plant Material Centers should be fully-funded at $9 million

DOI-BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

For several decades, ASTA members have successfully supplied native seeds to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) for post fire rehabilitation and other reclamation projects spanning millions of acres.

The federal government is an important customer. ASTA members are committed to meeting the seed needs of the BLM.

However, an increasing demand for highly specialized, locally-sourced seed can unnecessarily raise the cost of reclamation projects. Increased costs can result in tens of thousands of acres not being reseeded, thereby putting them at unnecessary risk of highly destructive erosion as well as further expansion of invasive weeds such as cheatgrass.

ASTA Position
Congressional oversight is needed so that the BLM's procurement policies are based on the realities of servicing large-scale emergency and non-emergency situations.

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FOOD SAFETY MODERNIZATION ACT

Seed production facilities prepare seed for commercial sale with the intent of their use for planting. These facilities are affected by the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) because a small portion of seeds are diverted for consumption when their intended use cannot be achieved. Current draft guidance from FDA has corn seed production facilities falling under FSMA regulatory requirements that don't apply to soybean and vegetable seed facilities.

The implementation of FSMA regulations in seed production facilities represents new burdensome regulations that would have no corresponding increase in food safety.

ASTA Position
ASTA urges the new administration and Congress to review the implementation of FSMA to ensure it takes a risk-based approach to regulation.

The seed industry is bringing agriculture education to life through the Tomatosphere program. Seed is sent into space via the International Space Station then sent to classrooms. Students in grades K-12 can investigate the impact of space travel on the tomato plants as they grow.

For more information visit
www.firsttheseedfoundation.org/tomatosphere

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