

BRIEFING NOTE

Seed Movement during the COVID-19 pandemic

THE ISSUE

The world faces a serious health crisis with “SARS-CoV-2” and the disease it causes “coronavirus disease 2019” (COVID-19), now declared by the World Health Organization as a pandemic.

Many countries are taking public measures and the ISF Secretariat were informed that several of them have classified the food and agriculture sector as “essential” to allow the continued movement of goods, and to allow the employees to continue their work. More important than ever is our engagement and proactive work to ensure that seed is available for the upcoming planting season and also to ensure seed production.

As you know March and April are the most critical months for the sowing of spring crops (maize, sunflower, soybean, canola, spring wheat and barley, open field vegetables etc.) in the northern hemisphere and autumn crops in the southern hemisphere. If farmers miss this window because seed is not delivered to the fields in time, the result would be serious food and feed shortages in the second part of the year. This is a situation that we cannot afford in these already volatile times.

ISF will be partnering with other international organizations who represent various agricultural input sectors in an effort to keep agriculture high on the agenda of policy makers even in these difficult times; to reiterate that there is currently no evidence that food is a likely route of transmission of the virus.

ISF wishes to work closely with its member associations and companies to address any issues with seed supply that may arise locally or regionally.

THE OBJECTIVE

Our goal is to make concrete proposals to and share best practices with international agricultural organizations and national governments on how to enact adequate policies and measures that can mitigate the impact of SARSCoV-2 on seed supply.

THE RESPONSE

The Secretariat have collected different information related to the movement of seed under the COVID-19 crisis from seed associations and seed companies in different parts of the world.

Information collected suggest that the main issues facing the seed industry under COVID-19 pandemic are as follows

- Issues related to transportation of goods either domestically or internationally due to the reduce number of flights, low number of drivers and slow process of the necessary documentation because of lower number of staff.
- Cost of air freight and reduction / elimination of commercial flights
- The sale of seeds / plants (vegetables, lawns, etc.) to amateur gardeners has stopped. This will impact some seed suppliers, especially left-over stock
- The Ornamental industry has been severely affected due to the closure of garden centres (deemed non-essential services) and loss of contracts with supermarkets
- Mobility of personnel between countries due to current border restrictions

CURRENT SITUATION FOR SPECIFIC REGIONS

AUSTRALIA –

Current situation and critical issues

Information provided by the Australian Seed Federation (ASF) indicates that they are working closely with other agricultural input supplier industry associations (CropLife Australia, the fertilizer industry and the animal medicines industry), and promoting the messaging of the ISF, and also national and state farming organisations regarding the importance of the agricultural supply chain to ensure food security.

They have highlighted that potentially an area where concerns may originate is in freight costs – as air freight is becoming increasingly expensive due to the virtual shutdown of commercial passenger aircraft, and space on seas freight is filling up quickly.

The ASF also informed key outcomes of a meeting with Minister Littleproud (via teleconference)

- Agriculture will not become a non-essential service, it is imperative for food security that Australian farmers can keep on farming – relates to inputs, harvest and trade (domestic and international).
- The Commonwealth is working the States (who have their own sovereign rights) regarding interstate border movements.
- The Commonwealth view is that interstate border restrictions should only apply to people who are looking to travel for holidays or social visits – trade and commerce should be allowed to continue. States are currently dealing with the granularity of the implications of closing their borders in different ways (which again is their sovereign right).
- The Commonwealth is working to ensure labour supply for farm workers

See below a summary for two states:

- **Queensland** - the state government declares Agriculture an essential service
- **New South Wales** - *“The NSW Minister for Agriculture, Adam Marshall, has issued a statement personally assuring the agriculture sector that production and businesses*

within it are NOT impacted by the NSW Government's restrictions around non-critical activity."

NEW ZEALAND –

Current situation and critical issues

According to the New Zealand Grain and Seed Trade Association (NZGSTA) the Government has provided information on '*essential businesses which means the seed industry and those that support them can continue to operate.*'

However, the government has made clear that that this is a privilege and not a right. Significant lobbying took place with Cabinet to allow the primary sector and its support industries to retain "Essential business status" as 90% of the primary sector is export related activity rather than domestic food supply.

Given that there has been no time to put clear regulations in place for every industry sector, the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) have stated that this a time for the primary sector to show leadership and take all the necessary steps to ensure it does not become one of the sources of Covid-19 spread inside New Zealand.

Productivity is absolutely secondary to worker and public health. If it is shown to occur that the place of work has caused COVID 19 infection to spread then it is to be expected that your business to be immediately shut down.

EUROPE –

Current situation and critical issues

On 23 March 2020 the EU Commission has published border management guidelines specifying that "green lanes" should be created to safeguard the supply with commodities and life-critical services.

Information collected confirms that the availability of transport capacities and staff, as well as the multitude of different and uncoordinated rules at borders are the main problems which prevent or hinder the circulation of seeds in within the EU.

Measures and best practices

Euroseeds had several exchanges with the European Commission to raise awareness of the problem of transporting seeds / plants in the European Union during this crucial period of the year. They have proposed that the Commission publish a "Guide" to countries for the movement of essential goods including seeds and plants.

The European Commission published on Monday 23 March a guide on how to implement its border management guidelines to keep freight moving around the EU and keep supply chains running European scale.

They have also requested a specific note from the Commission which would clarify the coverage of essential goods and services include agricultural inputs in as much detail as possible in the main guidelines.

Euroseeds has informed the CMO of the specific problems linked to the supply by air freight of third countries with a counter-seasonal production of seeds to be delivered in Europe knowing that the CMO can only help by its advice on the procedures in the European airports.

The Director General of the European Commission, DG Health and Food Security, Anne Bucher published on March 24, a letter of support for seeds essential for the maintenance of food systems. Through this letter, it calls on the Member States to ensure continuous production and circulation of seeds.

Activities such as seed health testing is allowed under new regulations imposed by the European Union see Article 5 (below)

Official controls and other official activities may exceptionally be performed:

(a) in the case of analyses, testing or diagnoses to be performed by official laboratories, by any laboratory designated for this purpose by the competent authority on a temporary basis;

NETHERLANDS -

Current situation and critical issues

The ornamentals sector was hard hit. The famous flower auction is currently destroying some 80% of its produce because it is not sold and retail chains like supermarkets and garden centres all over Europe has cancelled contracts for bedding plants. This has an immediate effect on the planting materials sector.

Challenges in vegetable and field crop seeds relate more to transport and workers. Road transport faces challenges at borders and is related to shortages of drivers and provisions for such drivers when highway restaurants are closed. Hundreds of trucks are on the road until mid-April for seed potato alone; similarly, young vegetable plants are on their way to customers all over Europe. EU included all agricultural supplies in the 'Green Lane' procedure on the 23rd March 2020, including also cross border transport of essential workers.

The coronavirus pandemic is having a major disruptive impact on European transport and mobility. That last aspect is very important as well, since seasonal workers are important in both horticultural production and also the seeds and planting materials sector.

Challenges with air freight are quickly increasing, both for bringing in raw seed from the production locations to the warehouse, and for supplying customers all over the world. These challenges include high costs and delays.

FRANCE –

Current situation and critical issues

Business activity is maintained for the time being with a BCP, but several difficulties are beginning to be noted, as highlighted below:

1. Lack of operational manpower
2. Part of the teams out of work, sometimes discussions on the right of withdrawal.
3. Management of the work force - resources are concentrated on priority activities (preparation of spring sowing, basic seeds and commercial seeds). In some cases, temporary workers are sought after.
4. Companies are thinking about recognizing the commitment of the employees present.
5. Constraining traffic measures which cause very significant administrative constraints, especially for the smallest structures: several difficulties in updating movement certificates and their understanding in the field, whether by employees or law enforcement.
6. The ban on car-pooling is also a problem for employees in rural areas.
7. The sale of seeds / plants (vegetables, lawns, etc.) to amateur gardeners has stopped, stores (garden centers, multi-businesses) have mainly reduced access to the food shelves for animals or products grocery store.
8. Unsold stocks will carry over to the market next year, which may pose risks for the continuation of their activity and potential impacts on their plant / seed suppliers (solvency, stocks ...).
9. Risk of lack of hydro alcoholic solution and masks. Some companies have launched their own production of hydro alcoholic gel.
10. For research and development: difficulty in setting up trials and putting plants into production due in particular to the shortage of employees but also to the "barrier" rules which are difficult to set up.
11. The situation of market gardeners also has an impact on seed companies because the lack of labor for harvesting and the stopping of sales on the markets lead to cancellation of orders. There are risks for the continuation of their activity and potential impacts on their suppliers of plants / seeds (solvency, stocks, etc.).

Deliveries on French territory:

While last week, the transport seemed mainly to be carried out without difficulty, with attention paid to expeditions sent to the Great East where activities are more disrupted, the system is deteriorating. Although no list of priority sectors has been put in place by the government, companies sometimes have difficulty finding carriers who must prioritize their activity by marking certain sectors identified as "priority". In fact, demand for the transport of food products has increased by 15% and transport companies are also faced with downsizing. Certain delivery areas are refused. The delivery of customer packages against signature begins to be complicated because the drivers want to avoid contact and therefore

a non-delivery rate is higher Increase in the cost for taking into account empty returns. Messaging also encounters some difficulties.

Regarding export to European Union countries or third countries

The situation is mixed, and companies encounter more difficulties, see below:

- ✓ Longer border crossing
- ✓ Significant delays,
- ✓ Strong increase in cost, especially air freight
- ✓ Reduced workforce in ports and shortage of containers
- ✓ Lack of containers and trucks
- ✓ Shipments to Ukraine and Russia are complicated.
- ✓ Slowdown in obtaining shipping documents is noted
- ✓ Abolition of ferries for the UK
- ✓ Very few commercial / freight flights from the USA
- ✓ Commercial aircraft from Chile are no longer allowed

Regarding the import of off-season seeds

Returns of basic and commercial seeds from off-season areas are complicated by the reduction / elimination of commercial flights as well as blockages in customs (phytosanitary analyzes are not considered as priority by customs).

Seed Analysis

The SNES (National Seed test Station) and the FNPSMS (laboratory approved for corn certification analyses) are both in reduced operation (spacing of laboratory staff, work stoppages, potential lack of consumables in the long term). The two laboratories therefore prioritized the analyzes to be carried out :

- ✓ Certification when no laboratory was undertaken,
- ✓ ToBRFV
- ✓ BIO with prioritization. There is a risk that not all the necessary analyzes can be carried out.

To this problem is added the ability for SOC agents to take samples by ISTA certified agents. There is an official delegation certificate which allows companies with ISTA certified personnel to take the samples in corn and sunflower. It had been mentioned that SOC authorized this same type of sampling by agents certified for rapeseed. For some companies, the organic demand campaign for rapeseed begins in April and represents a significant number of analyzes. For vegetable plots, the samples must be taken by the SOC. The UFS launched a rapid survey on the subject, with a good rate of return in order to

estimate the needs of the professionals to best organize the priorities in coordination with the Gnis, SOC and SNES.

Monitoring of production in the field

Potential difficulty or lengthening of some operations for rapeseed and vegetable seeds which involves the mobilization of several people at the same time.

SPAIN –

Current situation and critical issues

A "State of emergency" decree published on March 14 (463/2020), modified on March 17 (decree 465/2020) did not include specific measures for agriculture. The agricultural and food sector asked in a press release of March 16 to take specific account of the sector.

On March 18, the government published an information note which recognizes the importance of the agricultural sector, including seeds, and authorizes their activity:

"Agricultural, animal and aquacultural production, as well as fishing, processing agricultural and fishery products, veterinary centers or clinics, transport and distribution of foodstuffs, as well as its marketing by retail to consumers, form the food supply chain whose activity must be guaranteed in good condition alarm. This implies that the activity of agrifood companies as a whole, including agricultural, livestock, aquaculture and fishing activities, must be maintained, but also that of companies which, in turn, provide them with the necessary inputs to their functioning [including seeds....]."

ITALY –

Current situation and critical issues

Different decrees have been issued to restrict the movement of people and goods, especially for all deferred and non-essential activities.

A decree of March 11 provides that retail business activities are suspended, except for food and basic necessities activities, identified in an appendix to the decree. The decree also states that the agricultural, livestock and agri-food sectors, including the supply chains that supply goods and services, are guaranteed in accordance with hygiene and health standards.

Agriculture and animal husbandry are therefore considered essential for ensuring the food supply, including the seed / plant sector. However, the sale of seeds and plants to amateurs is not authorized.

A second decree was published on the 22nd March 2020 which does not change the status of the seeds / plants sector. This decree indicates that all industrial and commercial production activities are suspended, with the exception of those indicated in Annex 1 (Agricultural crops and production of animal products, Food industries, Wholesale trade of agricultural raw

materials and live animals, Wholesale trade of food products, drinks and tobacco products ...).

Functional activities to ensure the continuity of the supply chains for the activities listed in Annex 1, as well as public utility and essential services referred to in letter e), are always authorized, subject to communication with the prefect the province where the production activity is located, in which the companies and administrations benefiting from the products and services related to the authorized activities are specifically indicated; the prefect may suspend the above activities if he considers that the conditions referred to in the previous period do not exist. Until the adoption of measures to suspend activity, it is legitimately exercised on the basis of the communication made.

Difficulties:

- ✓ Transport : difficulties due to the decrease in the number of drivers.
- ✓ Delivery / export : several countries have impose restrictions, Austria, Slovenia, Croatia, Romania, Bulgaria, Poland, Ukraine and Russia; that the Italian government has successfully raised for Slovenia and Austria.
- ✓ Seed certification and phytosanitary controls: the decrease in staff makes it difficult to carry out all of the controls.
- ✓ Sale to amateur gardeners: it is not possible.

Measures and best practices

Associazione Italiana Sementi (Assosementi) asked that in relation to issues related to seed certification and phytosanitary controls the sampling by companies and self-checks be considered sufficient. The association awaits a reply.

Assosementi have requested that open stores do not practice zoning, that garden centers, retailers, etc. can open in compliance with security measures and that if this is not possible they can respond to their customers' requests through sales remotely (telephone or internet) and deliver orders to them. The association awaits a reply.

GERMANY -

Current situation and critical issues

The major part of the propagation material needed for spring sowing seems to have reached Germany by now.

The situation at the frontiers between EU member states is by now less dramatic. This also holds true to the situation at the Polish border where initial traffic queues of approx. 60 kilometers have by now nearly disappeared. Apart from the Polish border, delays have been experienced mainly at the borders to Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Estonia (both directions).

The main problem are the EU outside borders (Ukraine, Belarus etc.). At present, lorries from third countries scheduled to fetch goods in Germany have been overdue for weeks, since entry into the EU is being denied. Potato plants for planting e.g. are in great danger of going to waste due to frost.

In general, there are great legal insecurities for lorry drivers due to quarantine provisions. It can be envisaged that haulage capacities will suffer from increasing scarcity of drivers (especially from Eastern Europe) and lorries. In the long term, problems might occur in connection with contra-cyclic seed multiplications, e.g. in Latin America.

No such impact has as yet come in relation to seed certification or tests (plant health and quality).

A number of companies, in particular those active in seed trade, have received an increased number of termination notices from their contractual partners, obviously in relation with the imposed restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The legal issue is whether these Covid-19 related measures really entitle the contractual partner to terminate the contract. All that can be said at present is that the situation must be evaluated in the light of the individual terms and conditions, in particular the contractual provisions and the individual context. In this sense, it will be the responsibility of each individual company who will have to evaluate the terms of its agreements and the validity of the terminations.

Measures and best practices

After consultations between the German Federated States and the Federal Ministries for Economy, Health and Transport and the Federal Ministry for Food and Agriculture (BMEL), in particular the Department for Food Emergency Preventions, a Guideline has been drafted with a definition for the term “system-critical infrastructure for food supply”.

This guideline named “KRITIS Ernährung” is in accordance with § 2 Nos 2 and 6 of the German Law for Food Safety and Precaution. According to these provisions, a company relevant for food supply is a company *“involved in the production, processing or the distribution of products...”*.

Products in this sense are e.g. plants before harvest that may be used for the generation of food or feed, as well as seeds and propagation material. Among others, KRITIS Ernährung lists companies of agricultural trade, other forms of wholesale purchasers of agriproducts, trade in seed and plants for planting, fertilizers, plant protection products and animal feed as well as producers of animal feed, seed, fertilizers and plant protection products. It is a very positive evolution that our industry has been listed, both our product as well as the companies themselves.

The German Ministry for Food and Agriculture (BMEL) has proposed that the Federated States might want to refer the authorities competent under the German Law for Protection against Infectious Diseases (IfSG) within the Federated States to this list. This is a non-binding recommendation, and the list in this guideline is an exemplary list. If a certain type of operations is not listed explicitly, this does not preclude the respective company from this list. It is not yet clear how the Federated States will implement these guidelines, and the federated structure also means that the transposition will not be uniform. Publication of respective lists or a database are conceivable.

The German Plant breeders Association (BDP) have got into contact primarily with the German Ministry for Food and Agriculture (BMEL), but also with the representatives of the Federated States as well as with MoPs of the Federal Diet and of the Diets of the Federated States, with a view to ensure the legally safe categorization as system-critical infrastructure. On 23 March 2020 the EU Commission has published border management guidelines specifying that “green lanes” should be created to safeguard the supply with commodities and life-critical services. Euroseeds has interpreted the text of these guidelines that seed and plants for planting are included in this category (“agricultural production inputs”). Euroseeds has again tried to get a respective written official confirmation, while the German Plant Breeders’ Association is trying to get such a confirmation at national level.

BDP has identified the authorities in the Federated States that will probably be competent and has sent them a letter. In these letters, they have requested that the competent authorities, in the event of a decision on more far-reaching measures, make sure that the supply-critical industries to which their members belong will continue to be able to operate. They have enclosed a list of member companies in the respective federated state (Land), requesting to include them explicitly in the exemption rules.

In addition, they have informed the Ministers of Agriculture as well as the agricultural unions of the individual federated states on their activities and asked for support. For the time being, we cannot know whether such a list will be needed. This depends on the nature of the decisions taken by the competent authorities in the next days and weeks. As a precautionary measure, BDP have recommended that member companies get into contact with the competent regional or communal authorities to complement their efforts.

AUSTRIA -

Current situation and critical issues

Agriculture is exempt from the restrictions. The same is true for seed production and marketing.

Regarding the closing of shops, warehouses or agricultural trade (fertilizers, phytosanitary products, other operating products, etc.): the current closings aimed at avoiding contact with customers do not apply to agricultural trade. This includes warehouses, horticultural

companies, seedling producers, auctions of slaughter animals, and trade in local products, such as seeds, animal feed and fertilizers.

The ministry is asking for food and seed statistics because these products have been identified as relevant to the food chain. The most important problem is transport, to and from other Member States.

RUSSIA

Current situation and critical issues

The National Plant Protection released a WTO notification on the 3rd April 2020 informing trading partners that imports of goods, subject to veterinary and phytosanitary control, allowed with a copy of accompanying veterinary and phytosanitary documents provided by cargo receiver whenever a prior notification from the competent authority of exporting country is received, along with a guarantee letter from the cargo receiver confirming that it submits original documents after their receipt to the relevant Rosselkhoznadzor territorial unit.

AFRICA

Current situation and critical issues

South Africa

The main challenge is the huge informal sector of small entrepreneurs that is also a significant employer in South Africa. This sector will grind to a halt and along with it numerous small businesses that employ thousands of people. This will undoubtedly enhance poverty in this country significantly.

Kenya

The seed movement is quite slow especially the import. The export is still manageable but with delays. There are still a few flights per week.

The Government released a gazette notice on essential services that are allowed to continue during the COVID 19 period STAK alongside other stakeholders in the agriculture input (Seeds, Fertilizer and Pesticides) lobbied to have these actors be given direct recognition.

Measures and best practices

AFSTA statement has called on its member associations “to keep in touch and open communication lines with your Ministry of Agriculture and seed regulators to stem off the possibility of barring seed movement across cities and countries if we are to save our continent from starvation in the second semester of the year and beyond

South Africa

The Seed Industry is critical for food security and as such falls within the "Critical Business continuity services to support the health and safety of South Africans" Seed companies will be allowed to carry out all essential services such as seed production, cleaning, packing and distribution of seed including lab services. All services provided from SANSOR will continue remotely including phytosanitary support and seed certification.

ASIA

Current situation and critical issues

India

Companies have closed all major operations, might be doing so till further clearance from the Government. The main sowing season is in June, so April and May are very critical months for packing, testing and timely dispatches to the markets.

Companies can't ship seeds to India until April 14th since international flights are not allowed to land.

Currently the labour, Logistics, harvesting machinery and the plants are not operating at optimum levels. Lot of the migrant workers are headed back home thereby creating problems for farms, R&D farms, seeds production areas, seed packing and the winter crop harvesting. This is the concern for all companies, and stakeholders across India.

Japan

There are no reports of serious problem for the time being affecting the operation of Indian seed companies. The main concern is that Japanese seed companies rely overseas production sites for seed production, and production staffs can't visit the production sites for field inspections

With regard to international transportation, especially on air freight, there are many reports of delays, soaring fares, changes in transportation routes and delays due to issuing related documents by suspension of local operations. At present, on the Japanese side, both imports and exports and phytosanitary and customs are operated as usual.

Demand for flowers has dropped sharply, and the impact of this has been worried.

China

1. The transportation and logistics were not smooth. The traffic control made the vehicles can't pass normally. Logistics companies were closed and refused orders, seed companies' cost was increased.
2. Though the production of seeds was completed last year and the amount of major crops seeds were sufficient, up to 90 percent seed enterprises didn't complete seed processing and packaging.
3. Due to the shortage of protective materials such as face masks and disinfectants, companies were unable to start work according to the local prevention and control requirements.
4. Labour shortage, especially the enterprises with intensive vegetable seedling grafting.
5. The salesmen of seed enterprises cannot go to the countryside, marketing activities were difficult to be carried out.
6. The sales shops didn't open as usual, seeds were not available for farmers.
7. For the seed export trade, overall export plan was delayed, the transportation cost was increased, and the shipping and air transportation were slowed down. Some ports of the destination country were closed, the seeds were overstocked after arrival, and the customs declaration speed was slow.

China Seed Association proposed the research report to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs (MARA). MARA paid more attention to agricultural inputs.

The Philippines

So far there are no seed shortages in the country. Seed inventory level in the agri input dealers/distributors is 2.5 months. The Philippine government has taken measures to ensure unhampered movement of cargoes, agriculture and fishery inputs, food products and agribusiness personnel. Seed is part of the "essential critical infrastructure" as specified in the DA memorandum circulars.

Good measures from the governments (below) but the challenge is the poor implementation at the local government level. Some provincial governors and town mayors issued their own circulars inconsistent with the national government directives. To address this concern, the Secretary of the Interior and Local Government issued a memorandum circular to all local government officials to comply with the directives of the DA to ensure stability in the food supply.

Measures, best practices

India

FSII is urging the Union Government and all important State Government's to allow the movement of seeds and allow critical functions to proceed without any hindrance. Seeds in India come under the essential commodities and hence are exempt from the lock down. In many cases the Govt has responded well, but the communication flow is still slow down the line, thereby delaying its execution at the district level. NSAI is also communicating, to the Govts, to allow the unhindered movement of seeds.

China

For the call of CSA, State Councils and MARA implemented measures to ensure the production, supply and transportation of seeds, fertilizers, pesticides and feed. Accelerate the resumption of production of agricultural companies, establish a green channel for the transportation of agricultural inputs, such as seeds, fertilizers, pesticides and feeds..

The government also supplied financial support to enterprises in key fields, including agricultural enterprises, to guarantee their working capital.

Turkey

Turktd sent a letter demanding the following measures from the Government of Turkey

- Agricultural sector has both economic and social impacts in the society and is responsible for food production and security, therefore should be given priority.
- Seed sector is the most strategic sector in Agriculture and needs special attention. Seed Companies must continue their R&D and Production activities.
- The Ministry should implement measures to make sure that seed supply continues without interruptions while protecting the health and safety of its staff and the public.
- National and International institutions such as ISF, Euroseeds and APSA have been active in informing the ministries and their members to make sure that seed supply chain is not interrupted and necessary measures have been taken.
- The seed sector must be included in the financial packages implemented by the Governments to assist the seed companies to overcome financial difficulties they may face during the COVID-19 Period.

The Philippines

The Department of Agriculture (DA) has issued two memorandum circulars stating that:

All agricultural supply stores/outlets nationwide and animal clinics must be allowed to operate under a skeletal force. Green lane/cargo lanes have been designated by the Philippine national Police in checkpoints where agricultural and fishery inputs and food

products are transported. DA issued Food Lane passes to companies involved in the agri supply chain. All farming and fishing activities shall continue to ensure sufficient food supply across the country. These activities include, but not limited to land preparation, planting, crop maintenance, harvesting, threshing, drying, milling, sorting, packaging and trading. This includes all seed production and seed processing activities.

DA also issued IATF (Inter-Agency Task Force) identification cards to agribusiness

Personnel included in the skeletal workforce. Regulatory agencies like NPPO, Fertilizer and Pesticide Authority, seed quality control laboratories remain operational under a skeletal workforce. Some local government units are giving away “survival vegetable garden kits” to encourage households to grow their own vegetables in containers or in their backyards.

The challenge is the poor implementation at the local government level. Some provincial governors and town mayors issued their own circulars inconsistent with the national government directives. To address this concern, the Secretary of the Interior and Local Government issued a memorandum circular to all local government officials to comply with the directives of the DA to ensure stability in the food supply.

The Asia & Pacific Seed Association (APSA) has issued a [statement](#) to allay concerns about impacts of the novel coronavirus on seed trade in Asia and the Pacific. She pointed out that food and seed – and international packages containing seeds and other vital agricultural inputs – are not a source for coronavirus transmission.

AMERICA

Current situation and critical issues

US

So far, the U.S. seed industry is not seeing any seed shortages at the national or regional level. The home garden seed sector is seeing a huge spike in demand for product, and companies are working hard to keep up with that unprecedented demand.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) remains able to provide import and export services, issue permits and phytosanitary certificates. APHIS mail operations at major facilities are only operating on Tuesdays and Thursdays. APHIS requests everyone to send documents electronically as much as possible.

Seed Testing: ASTA recently conducted a survey of all state regulatory and commercial labs to determine their status. Many have reported that their output will be slowed due to reduced staff, limiting contact space between employees and/or limited hours of operation. Of the 63 labs that responded, 90% are still operating, although some of the regulatory labs have

limited accepting service samples. Most are not conducting field sampling, though. Most of the commercial labs are available for additional samples. All have set up drop-off programs for samples at their location to limit employee exposure. The Association of Official Seed Certifying Agencies reports Certification programs are operating as usual, but some states will have some variances.

Agricultural Labor: ASTA is continuing to engage with the USDA and the U.S. State Department to ensure visas for the H-2A agricultural visa program are continuing to be processed. There currently have not been any issues at the U.S./Mexico border for farm workers crossing the border, but any border closure for laborers would be a major issue.

Land Borders: Movement of seeds across the U.S. borders to Canada and Mexico is still permitted. The movement of people across the two borders is restricted to essential business only.

Trucking: The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) issued an emergency declaration which provides hours-of-service regulatory relief to commercial vehicle drivers transporting emergency supplies to deal with COVID-19. Seeds do not currently fall under the emergency declaration, but the FMCSA is actively considering adding seeds to any future expansions of the declaration. There are some concerns about truck driver shortages both domestically, and for cross-border movement between Canada and Mexico.

Ocean shipping: Sailings continue to be cancelled or delayed due to decreased demand for products entering the United States, and a reduced flow of cargo from China. All port operations and related transportation are considered essential critical infrastructure. All major port authorities in the U.S have contingency plans in place if one of their workers is diagnosed with COVID-19.

Air freight: ASTA has discussed the challenges facing the seed industry with the global air courier companies. Some passenger flights are converting to cargo-only to increase capacity, but we expect significant freight rate surcharges for the time being.

Peru Chile and Brazil

The complete lockdown affecting the business in general, however seed movement is relatively undisturbed among these countries. The new seed certification system by the SAG works well in Chile.

Measures, best practices

US

The Department of Homeland Security, Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) released [updated guidance on critical infrastructure workers](#). In this guidance, seed is included in the critical infrastructure: “Employees of companies engaged in the production,

storage, transport, and distribution of chemicals, medicines, vaccines, and other substances used by the food and agriculture industry, including **seeds**, pesticides, herbicides, fertilizers, minerals, enrichments, and other agricultural production aids.”

Because of the lack of clarity on what is captured in the guidance document, ASTA prepared a [memo for the seed industry](#) outlining what we consider to be included in the integrated seed sector. ASTA also distributed template letters for member companies to give to their employees so they could identify themselves as critical infrastructure workers. So far, the U.S. government has no plans to provide specific documentation for critical infrastructure workers or companies.

ASTA has participated in several initiatives at the national level to support the movement of seed, including advisory calls with the USDA, Department of Transportation, and Congress. The full details can be found online at the ASTA COVID-19 website, but a few highlights include:

- (March 24) [Ag Value Chain letter](#) to 50 state governors clarifying that food and agriculture are critical infrastructure
- (March 18) [Ag Value Chain letter](#) to President Trump, requesting support in ensuring a steady ag supply chain.
- ASTA signed on to a [multi-association letter to the Federal Maritime Commission](#) urging ocean carriers to waive detention and demurrage fees when the situation is out of the shipper’s control, including COVID-19.

Chile

Due to the limitations on commercial flights and suspension of postal services – result in exporting enterprises being unable to physically convey phytosanitary certificates to ports of destination for goods, or in such certificates arriving after shipments.

Therefore the Agriculture and Livestock Service of Chile (SAG) created and URL where NPPOs will be able to verify and obtain directly from the SAG certification system an image of all original data in the phytosanitary certificate, so as to guarantee the authenticity of any copies that processing entities submit from their respective countries (a scanned image, a photo or any other copy of the original phytosanitary certificate), with only the corresponding phytosanitary certificate number being required <http://multipuerto.sag.gob.cl/visitante/busquedaFito.asp>.

SAA

Seed Association of the Americas issued a statement in which they urge all National governments recognize this and declare the seed sector a critical link in the agri-food chain. Declaring seed as essential will help ensure crops are planted and food systems are supplied throughout this state of emergency.