



“Working Together to Make Trade Work”

NAEGA MAP Trip Report – IGTC-ISF Meeting

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Dates of Travel: Oct. 19-21, 2018, Berlin, Germany

Purpose of Travel: International Grain Trade Coalition (IGTC) Meeting with International Seed Federation on Information-Sharing Needs on Gene-Edited Crops

Participate as a member of the International Grain Trade Coalition’s (IGTC) Plant Breeding Innovation (PBI) Policy Team in a third meeting (my second) with a delegation from the International Seed Federation (ISF) on the information-sharing needs of the international grain trade concerning the commercialization of plant gene-editing techniques and those crops’ potential commingling into the general commodity stream.

The meeting was conducted on October 20, 2018 in Berlin, Germany, in conjunction with ISF committee meetings. It was a follow-up meeting to one conducted on April 26, 2018 at ISF’s headquarters in Nyon, Switzerland, and was the third such meeting conducted between IGTC and ISF to discuss the information needs of the global grain industry concerning the commercialization of crops developed through genetic engineering. The initial meeting, conducted in November 2017 in Arlington, Va., in conjunction with the annual General Assembly of IGTC, largely was an introductory presentation by IGTC of basic concepts on why the grain trade needed information on such crops.

The Berlin meeting was the second time that IGTC and ISF engaged in detailed, substantive discussions on specific information needed from gene-editing seed developers and those commercializing such seed to preserve the fungible, commingled commodity stream and to avoid trade disruptions. ISF again sent a top-level delegation, this time consisting of seven representatives including its president, Jean-Christophe Gouache from Limagrain in France. A new representative from ISF was Marc Cool from Corteva. Meanwhile, the IGTC PBI delegation was headed by Iliana Axiotiades of COCERAL. Other members of the IGTC delegation, in addition to myself, were: Krista Thomas (Canada Grains Council), Randal Giroux (representing IGTC corporate stakeholder Cargill Inc.) and IGTC Secretariat Katy Lee.

Prior to the meeting with ISF, the IGTC PBI Policy Team delegation convened for a comprehensive preparatory/planning meeting on the afternoon and evening of October 19. During this preparatory session, the IGTC delegation spent time developing extensive suggested edits and additions to an ISF initial draft guidance document that had been shared by ISF in advance – entitled ***“Guiding Principles for Information and Communication on Plant Breeding Innovation”*** – that once finalized is intended for distribution to its members on how to engage in information-sharing with the grain trade at the national, regional and local levels. The



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IGTC delegation found it forthcoming and constructive for ISF to allow IGTC to provide initial input on the draft guidance document before ISF shared it with its own members.

Summary of Findings/Conclusions/Accomplishments:

The meeting started with ISF providing a comprehensive overview presented by the Julius Kühn Institute’s Federal Research Center for Cultivated Plants on the applications of genome editing to various food-producing plants. The information presented is from a graduate study project based largely upon a literature search and review. The presentation included the number and types of genome editing being performed on various crops, including rice, corn, wheat, soybeans, barley, tomato, potato, canola and cotton. The graduate student study is scheduled to be completed in the spring of 2019, and ISF said it would conduct a webinar (tentatively in May 2019) to share new information with IGTC.

The ISF and IGTC also had substantive discussion on the potential impacts of the recent European Court of Justice (ECJ) decision that genome editing generally is subject to the European Union’s extensive regulatory regime that applies to transgenic crop biotechnology. European members of both ISF and IGTC expressed the view that it will be difficult for European governments to enforce the ECJ’s decision because of the time and effort required for detection. It was decided that COCERAL would take the lead on behalf of IGTC in working with the European Seed Association to devise potential strategies for addressing the court decision, including evaluating potential options for amending the EU’s biotechnology law to address genome editing in a different manner following European Parliamentary elections scheduled for 2019.

Building off previous discussions in April with ISF, the IGTC PBI Policy Team focused discussions with ISF on three major areas: 1) conducting joint meetings with international governments to discuss and obtain insights on their plans regarding regulatory oversight of genome editing; 2) obtaining further information from the food industry on consumer-related information needs that likely will arise regarding genome-edited crops used in food or as food ingredients; and 3) providing input on ISF’s draft ***“Guiding Principles for Information and Communication on Plant Breeding Innovation”*** document that was to be presented later in the week to various ISF committees for consideration.

The author believes that this most recent meeting with ISF was the most productive thus far, likely attributed to the fact that delegations representing the two organizations remained essentially the same – with one new participant for each – which has contributed to a building of trust and mutual respect that resulted in more open conversation. The identification of significant issues during the April meeting laid the groundwork for continued progress in each of the topics identified for further work. The major outcomes, in addition to those outlined above, are contained in a joint IGTC-ISF Meeting Report that is being shared within both organizations.

From the author’s perspective, the following outcomes are of particular significance:



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- 1. Joint Meetings and Collaboration with International Governments:** It was agreed that IGTC and ISF would collaborate to conduct joint meetings with international government delegations to discuss their respective plans for providing regulatory oversight of genome editing in crops used for food, feed and for further processing. This would be a major departure from previous meetings that have been organized with foreign governments by the seed industry, which have *not* included participation from the grain trade. As part of this future collaboration, ISF and IGTC are to develop in advance agreed-upon messaging that will be utilized in such joint meetings with governments. Among the points to be emphasized in such meetings are: 1) the importance of alignment in governmental decision-making and transparency of requirements and decisions, both for domestic premarket assessment of new genome-edited varieties for cultivation and the import/export of seed, commodities, processed products and food containing ingredients derived from genome-editing technology; 2) collaboration and information-sharing at international meeting (such as the Like-Minded Group meeting conducted in Natal, Brazil in September 2018); and 3) collaboration and information-sharing regarding in-country outreach involving national and regional seed and grain trade members.

The IGTC delegation stressed that it can be an asset to ISF in conveying the importance of genome-editing technology to world food security, the importance of developing a regulatory oversight framework based on science and prudent risk-assessment and risk-management principles for assessing genome editing; the need for regulatory coherence and synchronicity; and the importance of avoiding trade disruptions associated with genome-edited commodities that may be present in the commingled, fungible grain supply.

ISF also recommitted to sharing information with IGTC on an ongoing basis concerning its “International Policy Overview” table concerning the status of various international governments’ planned regulatory oversight and policies regarding different categories of plant breeding technologies, including genome editing.

- 2. Joint Meetings and Collaboration with Food Companies on Consumer-Related Issues:** Similarly, building off previous discussions, ISF and IGTC agreed to collaborate in joint meetings with food companies to learn more about the specific information being requested by their consumers/customers about genome edited foods and food ingredients. The goal is to conduct at least two such joint meetings with food companies – at least one in Europe and one in the Western Hemisphere – before the ISF and IGTC conduct their joint next meeting on genome editing, tentatively planned for June 2019, so that IGTC and ISF have a common understanding about the information needs of the value chain. ISF and IGTC also agreed to share information gathered from their respective separate interactions with companies and associations representing the food sector and consumer groups on attitudes toward gene-editing.



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- 3. ISF Guiding Principles for Information and Communication on Plant Breeding Innovation:** The ISF appeared to be receptive to many of the extensive suggested substantive edits provided by IGTC during this meeting to its initial draft *“Guiding Principles for Information and Communication on Plant Breeding Innovation”* document. Further, ISF indicated it would share an updated copy of the document with IGTC once its various committees had an opportunity to review and provide input on the draft during the ISF meetings that ensued during the remainder of the week in Berlin.
- 4. Interaction with Farmer/Producer Organizations:** IGTC and ISF committed to supporting their respective members on collaboration and information-sharing with relevant farmer and agricultural producer organizations. In this regard, it was recommended that the two organizations develop a joint set of agreed-upon talking points for meetings with key partners in the producer community to ensure they represent both organizations’ perspectives. From IGTC’s perspective, this should facilitate expanded messaging on the international grain trade’s concerns about transparency and the importance of preventing trade disruptions related to genome editing.
- 5. Guiding Principles for Segregation of Commodities with Functionally Different Output Traits:** ISF agreed to follow up on discussions with its members on the action item identified in April 2018 on developing guidance or principles (e.g., closed-loop segregation systems) to address gene-edited crops that express functionally different output traits.
- 6. Other Findings and Conclusions:**
 - ISF and IGTC discussed conducting another meeting in June 2019 in conjunction with previously scheduled events planned for that month in Europe by both organizations.
 - IGTC committed to continue to encourage IGTC members and corporate stakeholders to reach out to ISF members at the national and regional level to begin the process of information-sharing on plant breeding innovation.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that:

- Based upon the progress made, the IGTC PBI Policy Team proactively should reach out to ISF in the very near future to schedule and initiate meetings with international governments and at least two food companies – preferably one in Europe and one in the United States – to discuss regulatory approaches and consumer information needs, respectively, prior to the next meeting of the IGTC and ISF PBI delegations in June.



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- IGTC should consider directing its PBI Policy Team to develop a companion document to ISF’s ***“Guiding Principles for Information and Communication on Plant Breeding Innovation”*** document that could be distributed to IGTC members encouraging that they reach out to their national, regional and local seed associations to create a framework for information-sharing discussions. IGTC also should consider developing a mechanism for collecting information and insights gained by its members on planned commercialization of genome-edited crops during such discussions at the national, regional and local levels, and distribute such information to the IGTC membership.

- It was extremely valuable to have an IGTC corporate stakeholder – Dr. Giroux – who has extensive experience in grain handling operations, merchandising, logistics and supply chain execution included as part of the IGTC delegation at this meeting. It strongly is recommended that such an expert corporate stakeholder continue to be involved in any future meetings with ISF, which will be essential as future discussions delve into more detail on specific, achievable ways to meet the information-sharing needs of the global grain trade.