



# THE INTERNATIONAL TREATY ON PLANT GENETIC RESOURCES FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

**T**he International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, an international binding agreement with the overall goal of supporting global food security, was adopted by the FAO Conference in 2001 and entered into force in 2004.

The Treaty allows governments, farmers, research institutes and agro-industries to work together by pooling their genetic resources and sharing the benefits from their use – thus protecting and enhancing our food crops while giving fair recognition and benefits to local farmers who have nurtured these crops through the millennia.

In today's world, the pressure is on to improve agricultural production by developing food crops that can adapt to environmental changes and meet the

growing food demands of a constantly increasing population. Under the Treaty, crops that produce our food – our breads, our curries, our tortillas, and our couscous – are put into a common pool. As nations ratify the Treaty, they begin the process of setting up national commissions and committees to oversee implementation. This means ensuring conformity of the country's laws, regulations and procedures with its obligations under the Treaty and providing guidance for including the relevant genetic resources in the Treaty's Multilateral System (MLS).



## THE DISAPPEARANCE OF OPTIONS

Over the millennia, humans have relied on more than 10 000 different plant species for food. Yet, today, we have barely 150 species under cultivation. Of those, only 12 species provide 80 percent of all of our food needs and just four of those – rice, wheat, maize and potatoes – provide more than half of our energy requirements. What has happened to the other 9850? The answer is startling. If they have not been lost already, they are vulnerable.





## THE TREATY PROVIDES INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO PROTECT HUMANITY'S LONGEST TRADITION – AGRICULTURE

### ● Multilateral System

The Treaty's truly innovative solution to access and benefit sharing, the Multilateral System, puts 64 of our most important crops – crops that together account for 80 percent of the food we derive from plants – into an easily accessible global pool of genetic resources that is freely available to potential users in the Treaty's ratifying nations for some uses.

### ● Access and Benefit-sharing

The Treaty facilitates access to the genetic materials of the 64 crops in the Multilateral System for research, breeding and training for food and agriculture. Those who access the materials must be from the Treaty's ratifying nations and they must agree to use the materials only for research, breeding and training for

food and agriculture. The Treaty prevents the recipients of genetic resources from claiming intellectual property rights over those resources in the form in which they received them, and ensures that access to genetic resources already protected by intellectual property rights is consistent with international and national laws. Those who access genetic materials through the Multilateral System agree to share any benefits from their use through four benefit-sharing mechanisms established by the Treaty.

#### BENEFIT-SHARING MECHANISMS (ART 13)

- exchange of information
- access to and transfer of technology
- capacity-building
- sharing of any commercial benefits



### ● Farmers' Rights

The Treaty recognizes the enormous contribution farmers have made to the ongoing development of the world's wealth of plant genetic resources. It calls for protecting the traditional knowledge of these farmers, increasing their participation in national decision-making processes and ensuring that they share in the benefits from the use of these resources.

### ● Sustainable use

Most of the world's food comes from four main crops – rice, wheat, maize and potatoes. However, local crops, not among the main four, are a major food source for hundreds of millions of people and have potential to provide nutrition to countless others. The Treaty helps maximize the use and breeding of all crops and promotes development and maintenance of diverse farming systems.



The information provided in this document is to introduce basic and general information about the Treaty and its MLS and not to be construed as defining any terms or interpreting any provision of the Treaty.

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Further information about the work of FAO on biodiversity is available at: [www.fao.org/biodiversity](http://www.fao.org/biodiversity)