

# ISF launches practical social rights guidelines for seed production

*New document provides sector-wide, pre-competitive guidelines to help seed companies, suppliers, and growers strengthen responsible labor practices*

LISBON, PORTUGAL, May 20, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The International Seed Federation (ISF) has issued a new guidance document aimed at helping seed companies, suppliers, growers, and associations strengthen social rights and ethical practices in seed production.

The guidelines, "A Practical Guide for Seed Production: Navigating Social Rights and Ethical Practices in the Seed Sector," will be officially launched on 20 May at the ISF World Seed Congress 2026 in Lisbon.

Voluntary framework built for practical use

The guidelines are intended as a voluntary, practical tool to help stakeholders across the seed sector implement responsible labor practices and align with international social recommendations and standards. ISF recognizes that many companies and organizations already have robust social compliance and responsible sourcing programs in place. The document is designed to complement existing practices, reinforcing those efforts rather than replacing them, with a strong focus on awareness-raising, capacity building, and continuous improvement for organizations that are still building capacity.

"Seed production depends on people — farmers, workers, partners, and communities. Their rights, dignity, and well-being are fundamental to a resilient and responsible seed sector," said Michal Keller, Secretary General of ISF.

"With these guidelines, ISF is building on the great work that many companies are already doing and providing a practical pathway for other companies and actors involved in seed production to implement responsible business practices. In this way, it turns shared principles into practical action, while reinforcing the role of our federation as a platform where companies of all sizes can come together and work in a pre-competitive way to advance common goals for the greater good," Keller added.

ROOTED IN GLOBAL FRAMEWORKS, designed for companies of all sizes

The guidelines are grounded in internationally recognized frameworks, including the Ethical Trading Initiative Base Code, the OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Business Conduct, the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, and the International Labor Organization's core conventions. They are also framed to support companies responding to emerging due diligence and reporting expectations.

The document covers 12 core areas that are central to responsible seed production, including fair employment practices, forced and child labor, health and safety, legal compensation and benefits, working hours, non-discrimination, grievance mechanisms, responsible sourcing and supplier engagement, freedom of association, respect for Indigenous Peoples and local communities, and environmental protection.

Importantly, the guidance is intended for stakeholders across the seed value chain, from seed companies to smallholder growers and seasonal laborers. The document states that seed companies and suppliers, regardless of their level of social compliance maturity, are encouraged to apply the principles in ways that fit their context and capacity.

"This is a practical resource," said Ben Rivoire, ISF Director for Sustainability and Crop Value Chain Engagement. "It goes beyond general commitments by providing clear examples of what responsible practice looks like in day-to-day operations, including concrete dos and don'ts. It also reflects a strong belief that awareness-raising, capacity building, and collaboration are essential to lasting progress."

A pre-competitive effort built through collaboration

The guidelines were developed through a collaborative process involving member companies, national and regional seed associations, and non-governmental organizations, namely: BASF Nunhems, Bayer, Bayannaouer Guanr Agricultural Development Co Ltd, East-West Seed, Bejo Seeds, Semillas Fitó, and Syngenta; the American Seed Trade Association (ASTA), Asociación Nacional de Obtentores Vegetales (ANOVE), Seeds Canada, the Asia-Pacific Seed Association (APSA), Plantum, and Union Française des Semenciers (UFS); and NGOs including Arisa and Solidaridad.

Bas Gorissen, Global Sustainability Manager, BASF ☐ Nunhems: "At BASF ☐ Nunhems, we support the ISF voluntary Social Rights Guideline, because in our sector, we have a shared responsibility that goes beyond our products. I encourage companies across the seed value chain to actively adopt these guidelines and raise awareness internally. Use the checklist and the training tools to make social responsibility a part of everyday business. Together we can make social responsibility a practical reality across our industry, and raise the bar on this important topic."

Janina Lukas, Head of Ethics and Social Impact, Bayer: "At Bayer, respecting human rights and ethical business practices is the foundation of everything we do. By that, it was a natural step for us to also support the ISF guidelines on social responsibility. They help us to create a common

language across regions, operations, and cultures internally. And we can use the guidelines as common ground for how we want to work in seed operations.”

Christine Jong, Head of People, Culture, and Organization of Bejo: “At Bejo, we wholeheartedly support the social responsibility guidelines of the International Seed Federation. We believe these practical guidelines help to turn collective social values into positive action across the seed industry. Vegetable seed production is people-intensive and takes place in rural communities. Fair working conditions, safe workplaces, and respect for human rights are essential. The ISF guidelines give our industry a common language and a pragmatic framework. But it's only a starting point. Let's not take these guidelines as a checklist. We need to use them and talk about them internally and with our partners, and take concrete steps.”

Sucheta Ramprakash, Global Head of Sustainability, East-West Seed: “We supported this initiative because our industry depends on people, farmers, partners, workers, and communities, and their dignity and safety are essential for our long-term success. So, these guidelines help promote fair and safe working conditions and also respect human rights across the value chain. A unified approach helps build trust, reduce risk, and strengthen long-term sustainability. So I encourage all the seed companies to review guidelines and apply their own context so that together we can contribute to more resilient and strong communities and farming systems.”

Elisabeta Fitó, Corporate Director, Semillas Fitó: “At Fitó Seeds, we believe that seeds are the beginning of everything, crops, food, and the future. We decided to join the ISF Social Rights Guidelines because we believe this is the best way for our sector to move forward responsibly, pragmatically, and most importantly, collaboratively. These guidelines provide a framework grounded in international standards, adapted to our seed sector. That's why we encourage other companies to adopt them and promote them so we can build together a more ethical, resilient, and sustainable sector for the long term.”

Jason Allarding, Head of Sustainability, Health, Safety, and Risk Management, Syngenta, and Chair of the ISF Coordination Group on Environmental and Social Responsibility (ESR): “At Syngenta, we're very proud of the work we've done on fair labor practices in the past, and we're happy to collaborate with industry partners to bring forward a guidance that can support workers and social responsibility across our sector. One thing we've realized with our programs at Syngenta is that to make really systemic change, we have to work with others in our sector. We have to work collaboratively. This has been a trademark of our ESR group at the ISF, where we have looked for opportunities to collaborate, and this is clearly one of those.”

The full guidelines and e-learning course can be accessed on the [ISF website](#).

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