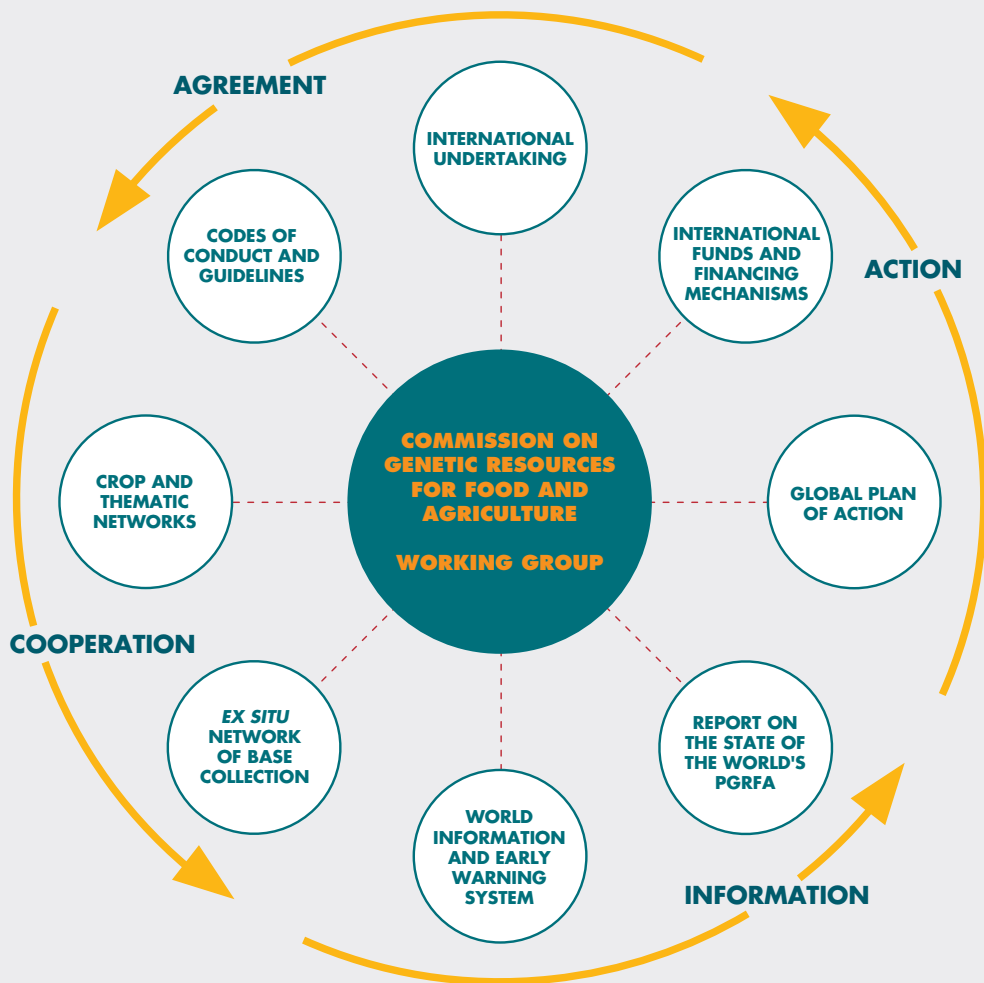


# The Global System and the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture

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Please click the diagram, or scroll down, for information on the components of the Global System.

In 1983, FAO established an intergovernmental forum: the Commission on Plant Genetic Resources (now the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture). The Commission has since developed a Global System for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of PGRFA. The objectives of the Global System are to ensure the safe conservation and promote the availability and sustainable use of plant genetic resources, for present and future generations, by providing as flexible framework for sharing the benefits and burdens.

***The following documents provide Progress Reports on the Global System:***

- [Progress Report under the FAO Global System for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of PGRFA.](#)
- [Progress Report on the Global System for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of PGRFA.](#)

## The Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture

The Commission is a permanent inter-governmental forum, where countries that are donors and users of germplasm, funds and technology can discuss, on an equal footing, matters related to genetic resources for food and agriculture, and can monitor the implementation of the principles contained in the Undertaking. The Commission aims to reach international consensus in areas of global interest. Relevant technical assistance agencies, inter-governmental organizations, development banks, non-governmental organizations and private foundations also attend the sessions of the Commission and report to it on their programmes and activities on genetic resources for food and agriculture.

The Commission has established two Intergovernmental Technical Working Groups, one for animal genetic resources for food and agriculture, the other for plant genetic resources for food and agriculture. The priority task of the ITWG for PGRFA is to examine implementation of the Global Plan of Action and related follow-up activities.

***For more information also refer to:***

- [the State of the World's PGRFA](#)
- [The Progress Report on the Global System](#)
- [Statutes of the CGRFA](#)
- [Statutes of the Intergovernmental Technical Working Group on Plant Genetic Resources](#)

## **Reports of the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture**

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***Reports of the following sessions of the Commission are found on this CD-ROM:***

- The Fifth Session, April 1993
- The First Extraordinary Session, November, 1994
- The Sixth Regular Session, June 1995
- The Second Extraordinary Session, April 1996
- The Third Extraordinary Session, December 1996
- The Seventh Regular Session, May 1997

## **Cooperation with the Convention on Biological Diversity**

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One task of the Commission, stated in its terms of reference is “to facilitate and oversee cooperation between FAO and ... in particular with the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity and the UN Commission on Sustainable Development, and to seek to develop appropriate mechanisms for cooperation and coordination in consultation with such bodies”. The terms of reference also provide for the Commission, “subject to approval by the Governing Bodies of FAO, as appropriate, to respond to requests from the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in the specific area of genetic resources of relevance to food and agriculture, [...] in particular, and as appropriate, through the Global System for the Conservation and Utilization of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture”.

### ***The most Relevant Decisions of the Conference of the Parties of the Convention are:***

- Decision II/15: “FAO Global System for the Conservation and Utilization of PGRFA”
- Decision III/11: “The Conservation and Sustainable Use of Agricultural Biological Diversity”

### ***This CD Rom also contains the full text of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Reports of the following Meetings of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention:***

- The Second Meeting, Jakarta, November 1995
- The Third Meeting, Buenos Aires, November 1996

### ***For more information also refer to:***

- The Progress Report on the Global System

## **Reports to the CGRFA on the activities of FAO and other organizations**

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### ***Reports from international organizations on their policies, programmes and activities on agricultural biological diversity:***

- Report from FAO on its policies, programmes and activities on plant genetic resources
- FAO Field programme activities with a crop genetic resources component (1995-1996)
- United Nations and Other Inter-governmental Organizations  
International Agricultural Research Organizations  
of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research
- International Non-governmental Organizations
- Additional Reports

## The International Undertaking on Plant Genetic Resources

The International Undertaking on Plant Genetic Resources, a non-legally binding instrument, was adopted by Resolution 8/83 of the 1983 FAO Conference, and interpreted and complemented by three Conference Resolutions (4/89, 5/89 and 3/91), now annexed to the Undertaking which introduced the concepts of Farmers' Rights (see below), national sovereignty over plant genetic resources, and an international fund for the implementation of Farmers' Rights. The Undertaking seeks to "ensure that plant genetic resources of economic and/or social interest, particularly for agriculture, will be explored, preserved and made available for plant breeding and scientific purposes." The implementation of the Undertaking is monitored by the Commission.

The Twenty-seventh Session of the FAO Conference in 1993 unanimously adopted Resolution 7/93, in response to the requests made in Agenda 21 and the Final Act of the Nairobi Conference which adopted the CBD, which requested FAO to provide a forum for negotiations among governments, through regular and extraordinary sessions of the Commission:

- "for the adaptation of the International Undertaking on Plant Genetic Resources, in harmony with the Convention on Biological Diversity;"
- "for consideration of the issue of access on mutually agreed terms to plant genetic resources, including *ex situ* collections not addressed by the Convention;" and
- "for the issue of realization of Farmers' Rights".

This process, which began in 1994, is still underway.

***For more information also refer to:***

***the text of the International Undertaking;***

- the State of the World's PGRFA
- the Progress Report on the Global System
- Fourth Negotiating Text of the International Undertaking for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture
- Characterization of various options for Scope and Access, and a notional assessment of the pros and cons

***.... and the following papers prepared for the CGRFA:***

- Access to plant genetic resources, and Farmers' Rights
- Analysis of some technical, economic and legal aspects for consideration in Stage II
- Legal and institutional matters
- Background Studies (Original languages)

## Farmers' Rights

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FAO Resolution 4/89 recognizes “the enormous contribution that farmers of all regions have made to the conservation and development of plant genetic resources, which constitute the basis for plant production throughout the world, and which forms the basis for the concept of Farmers' Rights.”

Resolution 5/89 defines Farmers' Rights as “rights arising from the past, present and future contribution of farmers in conserving, improving and making available plant genetic resources, particularly those in the centres of origin/diversity. Resolution 5/89 endorses the concept of Farmers' Rights for the purpose of ensuring full benefits to farmers, and supporting the continuation of their contributions, as well as the attainment of the overall purposes of the International Undertaking. The same Resolution further defines these objectives, as being to:

- “ensure that the need for conservation is globally recognized and that sufficient funds for these purposes will be available;”
- “assist farmers and farming communities, in all regions of the world, but especially in the areas of origin/diversity of plant genetic resources, in the protection and conservation of their plant genetic resources, and of the natural biosphere;”
- “allow farmers, their communities, and countries in all regions, to participate fully in the benefits derived, at present and in the future, from the improved use of plant genetic resources, through plant breeding and other scientific methods”.

***For more information also refer the section on “The international fund and financing mechanisms” and to:***

- [the State of the World's PGRFA](#)

## The International Fund and Financing Mechanisms

The FAO Conference in 1991 adopted Resolution 3/91, stating “that Farmers’ Rights will be implemented through an international fund on plant genetic resources, which will support plant genetic conservation and utilization programmes”, and agreeing that the “resources for the international fund as well as for other funding mechanisms should be substantial, sustainable and based on the principles of equity and transparency”, and “that through the Commission on Plant Genetic Resources, the donors of genetic resources, funds and technology will determine and oversee the policies, programmes and priorities of the fund and other funding mechanisms, with the advice of the appropriate bodies”. It has also been noted that funding could take the form of a window of an existing fund.

***For more information also refer to:***

- [The State of the World’s PGRFA](#)
- [The Progress Report on the Global System](#)

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## The Global Plan of Action

In 1991, the Commission requested the development of a rolling Global Plan of Action on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, with programmes and activities aimed at filling in gaps, overcoming constraints and facing emergency situations identified in the Report on the State of the World's Plant Genetic Resources. The periodically updated Plan would permit the Commission to recommend priorities and promote the rationalization and coordination of efforts.

The Commission agreed that the Plan was "to be financed, on a step by step basis, through the International Fund for Plant Genetic Resources, and to be implemented by appropriate agencies and organizations, under the supervision of the Commission". In 1993, the Fifth Session of the Commission considered that "by financing the Plan, through the International Fund and other funding mechanisms, as foreseen in Resolution 3/91, the international community would contribute to the practical realization of Farmers' Rights".

The Global Plan of Action was adopted by the International Technical Conference on Plant Genetic Resources, Leipzig, Germany, June 17-23, 1996.

### ***For more information, please refer to:***

- [The Global Plan of Action](#)
- [A summary of the GPA](#)
- [the Progress Report on the Global System](#)

### ***Related documents:***

- [Implementation of the GPA](#)
- [Revision of cost estimates for the Global Plan of Action](#)
- [Monitoring of the rolling Global Plan of Action](#)
- [Current expenditures on plant genetic resources](#)

## The State of the World's PGRFA

In 1989, the Commission “recommended that the Secretariat should periodically prepare a report on the State of the World’s Plant Genetic Resources, with the cooperation of other bodies concerned. The report should analyze the current plant genetic resources situation, and describe activities and programmes being carried out by regional, international and non-governmental organizations, with the aim of identifying gaps, constraints and emergency situations; this would allow the Commission to recommend priorities and ways of harmonizing the overall effort”. The Commission also agreed that the needs, emergencies and priorities identified in the Report on the State of the World’s Plant Genetic Resources would provide the basis for the operation and periodic updating of the Global Plan of Action.

***For more information, please refer to:***

- The Report on the State of the World’s PGRFA (“short version”)
- The State of the World’s PGRFA (“comprehensive version”)
- The Progress Report on the Global System
- Sub-regional Synthesis Reports
- Country Reports

## The World Information and Early Warning System

The World Information and Early Warning System on Plant Genetic Resources (WIEWS) collects, disseminates and facilitates the exchange of information that governments provide on plant genetic resources collections and related technologies. The WIEWS is an important tool for the periodic updating of the Report on the State of the World's Plant Genetic Resources. Its databases contain data on: the location of over 5.5 million plant genetic resources accessions, in some 1410 *ex situ* collections around the world; the structure and activities of national plant genetic resources programmes in almost all countries; some 8000 seed-supplying institutions around the world; commercial crop varieties; and relevant non-FAO databases and on how to obtain information from them. The Early Warning Mechanism is being developed to draw rapid attention to hazards threatening the operation of *ex situ* collections, and to the danger of the extinction of plant species and the loss of genetic diversity of crops for food and agriculture.

***For more information also refer to:***

- [the State of the World's PGRFA](#)
- [the Progress Report on the Global System](#)
- [summary Data of the WIEWS](#)

## The International Network of *Ex Situ* Collections

The Commission called for the development of the International Network in 1989, in line with Article 7.1(a) of the International Undertaking, because of the uncertainty of the legal situation of *ex situ* germplasm in genebanks, and of the lack of appropriate agreements to ensure its safe conservation. Because the provisions regarding access to genetic resources in the CBD (Article 15) do not apply to *ex situ* collections assembled prior to its entry into force, Resolution 3 of the Nairobi Conference recognized the need to resolve this issue within the context of the FAO Global System.

Twelve Centres of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research signed agreements with FAO in 1994, placing most of their collections (some 500,000 accessions) in the International Network. Through these agreements, the Centres accept, in particular, to hold designated germplasm “in trust for the benefit of the international community”, and “not to claim ownership, or seek intellectual property rights over the designated germplasm and related information”.

***For more information also refer to:***

- [the State of the World's PGRFA](#)
- [the Progress Report on the Global System](#)
- [Progress Report on the International Network of \*Ex Situ\* Germplasm](#)

## Thematic, Crop and Regional Networks

Cooperation can be facilitated through, Regional PGRFA networks, Thematic Networks and Crop Specific Networks.

***For more information also refer to:***

- [the State of the World's PGRFA](#)
- [the Progress Report on the Global System](#)

## Codes of Conduct and Guidelines

The International Code of Conduct for Plant Germplasm Collecting and Transfer provides a framework which governments may use in developing national regulations or formulating bilateral agreements. It was adopted by FAO Conference in 1993.

Other Codes of Conduct or Guidelines on PGRFA have been developed, or are being developed under the auspices of the Commission.

- The International Code of Conduct for Germplasm Collecting and Transfer
- The International Network of *Ex Situ* Germplasm Collections: agreement signed between FAO and the CGIAR Centres on 26 October 1994.
- Genebank Standards
- Genebank regeneration decision guidelines

***For more information also refer to:***

- the State of the World's PGRFA
- the Progress Report on the Global System