

Support in formulation of the national seed policies in the region

In many former USSR countries the seed sector is in transition to a more market-oriented model in which the private sector plays an increasing role. To support this process, Plant Production and Protection Division of FAO (AGPM) has focussed attention on national policies that can provide a favourable climate for new entrants, leading to a more diverse seed supply system for farmers. In March 2011, an expert consultation on seed policies was held in Milan, Italy to gather relevant experiences and to prepare a guideline for governments on the formulation and implementation of such policies.



Expert Consultation on Seed Policy, 28-30 March 2011, Milan, Italy

As a follow-up to this meeting, FAO and ICARDA organised a regional workshop on seed policies in Istanbul, Turkey in October 2011. Senior representatives from Ministries of Agriculture in all ten member countries of the Economic Cooperation Organisation participated and the wide range of experience within the region stimulated a lively discussion in the working groups.



Seed Policy Workshop for ECO Region, 10-14 October 2011, Istanbul, Turkey

Six of the countries in that workshop share the legacy of the soviet seed system, which was centrally planned and had no market dimension. This makes the transition process more challenging, especially considering the dramatic changes that have taken place in agriculture since independence. Among these, Azerbaijan and Kyrgyzstan requested assistance from FAO to prepare a national seed policy and these countries illustrate very different paths of development over the past 20 years.

Kyrgyzstan made rapid reforms in all sectors of the economy and in the case of seeds, this was reflected in membership of the relevant international organisations. However, despite the long history of seed production in the Republic, the final step to a truly commercial seed industry has not been achieved. Discussions about a policy to

address this problem were initiated some years ago and FAO organised national workshop in Bishkek on 20 September 2012 to revive this process. Based on this consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, a new policy is being prepared for submission to the Ministry.



National Seed Policy Workshop participants, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

Azerbaijan presents a very different scenario. Many features of the former soviet system have persisted and the government still provides substantial subsidies to seed producers. However, there is a concern to increase national food security and to integrate more closely with the international community in terms of procedures and standards for seeds and varieties. To launch this policy debate, a workshop was held in Baku on 18 October 2012 and there will be further meetings in the coming months to formulate a policy document.



National Seed Policy Workshop participants, Baku, Azerbaijan

An effective national seed policy should provide a framework for development of the seed sector by defining responsibilities and ensuring consistent decision-making. However, within the CIS countries another objective should be the harmonisation of variety lists and quality standards to facilitate movement across the complex borders inherited from the Soviet Union. National policies should therefore take account of the regional dimensions, while at the same time improving seed supply to their own farmers.