STATEMENT OF
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BEFORE THE
SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE

RATIFICATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL TREATY ON PLANT GENETIC RESOURCES FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE
(Senate Treaty Document 110-19)
May 19, 2016

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (the Treaty). I am here on behalf of my company HM.CLAUSE and the American Seed Trade Association which was founded in 1883. ASTA's broad membership includes over 700 companies engaged in plant breeding, production, and distribution of seed varieties including grains, oilseeds, rice, cotton, vegetables, flowers, forages, cover crops and grasses. ASTA members are research-intensive companies in the business of discovery, development and marketing of seed varieties with enhanced agronomic and end-use qualities. Ratification of the Treaty by the U.S. has always been an important issue for the American seed industry. Since its inception, the Treaty has been considered the preferred mechanism for plant breeders to move seed and plant materials between countries in order to improve varieties for the world's farmers.

Many people are not aware of the highly interdependent nature of our global food system. Seventy percent of the food we eat and grow comes from crops that are not native to the U.S. The resources to improve these crops have been brought into the U.S over time. The Treaty is an agreement that aims to enhance global food security through the continued access and exchange of materials used to improve seeds for farmers. Perhaps the most notable example of the impact of exchanging plant materials is the Green Revolution which is credited with saving millions of lives. The wheat that Norman Borlaug developed was based on a combination of materials from the U.S., Japan and Mexico which, in turn, thrived in India and Pakistan. We still use relatives of that wheat today in our breeding programs. There are many examples across crops. In vegetables, some disease and pest resistance in carrots has come from materials from South America and Europe. Green beans have disease resistance from French seed banks bred into commercial varieties.

No country, including the U.S., is self-sufficient when it comes to seed for the future. U.S. seed banks store, maintain and distribute over 560,000 crop varieties. However, over two million more crop lines and their relatives are held in seed banks outside of the U.S. Public and private plant breeders once enjoyed much freer access to seeds for research and development. However, certain countries began restricting access to their germplasm and the Treaty was

drafted to try to stabilize this situation. The U.S. played a key role in negotiations leading up to the creation of the final text of the Treaty during the Bush Administration. The intent was to create international rules and standards around access and benefit sharing with regard to seed used for agriculture. Recently, the implementation of the Nagoya Protocol (Nagoya) under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is further threatening our ability to exchange germplasm globally. With ratification, the U.S. would be able to resume its leadership position to enhance the functioning of the Treaty and greatly diminish the uncertainty created by the CBD and Nagoya.

Currently, the Treaty has 139 Contracting Parties, many of which are important sources of seed exchange and also competitors of the U.S., including all EU countries, India, Brazil and Japan. If those countries chose to, they could restrict access to their germplasm to only other contracting parties. Without ratification, U.S. agriculture could then be at a huge disadvantage.

Access to crop diversity is equally important to all sectors of agriculture including organic, conventional, public and private. Lack of access to global crop diversity will lead to lost opportunities to better adapt crops to changing weather and drought, and to address the threats posed by evolving pests and diseases. Improving yields will help us feed a growing global population. In the vegetable sector we are looking for new crop characteristics to enhance nutritional content, improve flavors and extend shelf-life to reduce food waste. Responding to these agricultural challenges requires a much deeper understanding of individual crop varieties, which have been developed under diverse conditions across the globe, and their wild ancestors. High throughput DNA sequencing technologies and bioinformatics tools provide new opportunities for university researchers to mine international collections of regional plant materials. These collections can be characterized and leveraged to provide important agronomic, nutritional, and other traits of societal value that can be utilized through traditional plant breeding. This work is hindered when the mechanism to exchange materials isn't in place, and instead has to be negotiated on an *ad hoc* basis.

The Treaty will benefit public and private breeders working on a variety of crop types, in addition to U.S. farmers who are already global leaders in productivity. As a specialized system to exchange plant materials, the Treaty puts all member countries on a level playing field and provides their plant breeders with clear terms and conditions. Secure access to global materials will enable U.S. researchers and the broader industry to supply the best seeds to our customers to grow more of the best food for tomorrow and into the future.

Support for ratification is broad. More than 80 companies, organizations and universities representing plant breeders, academics and seed users have expressed support for ratification to the Committee. In addition to ASTA, these groups include American Farm Bureau Federation, American Society of Plant Biologists, Crop Science Society, Association of Public and Land-grant Universities' Board on Agriculture Assembly, National Corn Growers Association, National Cotton Council, National Farmers Union and National Wheat Growers Association.

The Treaty provides a simple and non-controversial solution for a pressing problem. We came close to completing the ratification process in 2010 when the Treaty was passed by this Committee. No new laws are required to implement the Treaty in the U.S. and no new appropriations are needed. In fact, most of the obligations of the Treaty are already being met by the U.S. systems that are already in place.

On behalf of the American Seed Trade and the farmers and researchers who also support the Treaty, I urge the Committee to recommend ratification and support passage in the Senate. After ratification, the U.S. can resume the leadership role it once played guiding the system that supports all seed research and development to the benefit of U.S. farmers and consumers, as well as food security around the world.