

## **Tanzania Achieves International Seed Quality Compliance, Joins Elite African Agricultural Leaders**

### **TOSCI: Tanzania is producing world-class seeds**

The Southern Agricultural Growth Corridor of Tanzania (SAGCOT) places high-quality seeds at the core of a prosperous agricultural industry, key to achieving sustained food security and an energetic commercial scene. SAGCOT is at the forefront of fostering a dynamic seed ecosystem, applauding the achievements of key players such as the Tanzania Official Seed Certification Institute (TOSCI). The Director General of TOSCI, Patrick Ngwediagi, has recently brought to light the significant progress within the seed subsector

### **TOSCI's Quality Labels Lead the Charge in Protecting Farmers' Livelihoods**

Mr. Ngwediagi is well aware that seed quality serves as the foundation for the prosperity of crop farmers. With that in mind, TOSCI has made groundbreaking initiatives in the realm of seed certification and regulation. Through their innovative approach, significant progress has been made in securing seed quality and combating the prevalence of counterfeit seeds, demonstrating TOSCI's dedication to elevating agricultural standards and farmer success.

### **Rigorous Standards and Inspections Safeguard Seed Journey**

TOSCI enforces rigorous seed certification standards. This meticulous approach involves inspections and various checks throughout the seed production and sale process. The goal is not only to verify the physical condition of seeds but also to instil confidence among farmers regarding the seeds' authenticity and viability.

### **TOSCI Quality Labels: A Game-Changer for Combating Counterfeits**

Inspired by the Tanzania Bureau of Standards (TBS) marks of excellence, TOSCI introduced quality labels to combat a major challenge: counterfeit seeds. Previously, deceitful practices involved not only fake packaging but also seeds disguised as treated, offering no benefit to farmers.

"This fraudulent activity has become significantly more challenging to execute, as we now mandate that every seed seller uses TOSCI's quality seeds. This enforcement has led to a notable increase in the use of Labels, initially minimal, but now widespread. Consequently, incidents of counterfeit seeds have decreased substantially. This illustrates a clear correlation between the use of Labels and the reduction in legal violations related to seed quality among our people. The Label tool has proven immensely beneficial, and we are dedicated to further enhancing its effectiveness and reliability, Ngwediagi explains. TOSCI's mandatory quality labels for seed sellers have significantly reduced such risks.

### **Widespread Adoption of Labels Leads to Dramatic Decrease in Counterfeits**

Initially adopted minimally, TOSCI's quality labels have seen widespread acceptance, contributing to a notable decrease in counterfeit seeds. Ngwediagi emphasizes the clear correlation between label adoption and the reduction in legal violations, highlighting their critical role in ensuring seed market integrity.

### **Tanzania in full compliance with international seed quality standards**

Tanzania has made a remarkable stride in the agricultural sector, achieving full compliance with international seed quality standards. This accomplishment places the nation among the top five African countries in this area, alongside South Africa, Morocco, Tunisia, and Kenya.

"Another significant achievement for us is being among the six African countries that have fully aligned with all international systems," said Ngwediagi. This achievement is an indicator of Tanzania's dedication to rigorous quality initiatives and international best practices.

Ngwediagi explained the complexity of the process, highlighting the involvement of multiple international organizations with specific areas of focus, such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) for policy and the International Seed Testing Association (ISTA) for technical aspects.

Previously, Tanzania's seed export faced challenges due to the lack of accreditation for its national laboratory. This hurdle was overcome in May 2018 when the Morogoro laboratory received ISTA accreditation. As Ngwediagi emphasized, "Our seeds cannot be retested elsewhere, marking the first significant benefit of this accreditation." This eliminates delays and fosters trust with international partners.

### **Tanzania Elevates Its Agricultural Standards Through Rigorous International Inspections and New Partnerships**

Tanzania has once again solidified its position as a leader in the agricultural sector by successfully undergoing a stringent inspection process that reaffirms its dedication to excellence. According to Ngwediagi, the country recently completed a vital three-year inspection cycle, crucial for maintaining its esteemed accreditation.

"Every three years, we undergo a rigorous inspection to affirm our commitment to excellence; this is not a matter of chance," Ngwediagi emphasized, shedding light on the continuous and exhaustive evaluation process TOSCI faces. This triennial cycle involves ongoing evaluations, with reports issued throughout the period, culminating in an inspection that reconfirms Tanzania's adherence to international standards.

Ngwediagi proudly announced that Tanzania has once again passed these inspections, securing another three-year term for its laboratory on the international stage. "Failure to meet standards would result in our removal, but we have successfully passed once again," he noted, highlighting the importance of these certifications in affirming TOSCI's membership within the International Seed Testing Association (ISTA).

In addition to the rigorous inspections, Tanzania has expanded its focus to include field seed inspection, ensuring the integrity and quality of seed varieties from their initial release. This initiative aligns with the practices of the Organization for Industrial, Commercial, and Developmental Certification (OICD), a body known for its work with the affluent sectors of the world. While Tanzania is not a formal member of OICD, it has engaged with the organization's seed schemes since December 2016.

"We are not members of OICD... they manage various industrial and miscellaneous matters but have introduced various skills allowing non-members like us to participate," Ngwediagi explained. By aligning with OICD seed schemes, Tanzania has ensured that its seeds meet international standards, facilitating easier access to global markets. The adoption of the OICD seed schemes Label means that Tanzanian seeds are now exported without the need for additional labeling, sporting both the TOSCI and OICD emblems as per their agreement.

This development not only enhances the global recognition and acceptance of Tanzanian seeds but also underscores the country's proactive approach to meeting and exceeding international agricultural standards. Through rigorous inspections and strategic partnerships, Tanzania continues to demonstrate its unwavering commitment to quality, innovation, and global integration in the agricultural sector.

Ngwediagi, says that Tanzania is involved with the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV), a critical step towards safeguarding the intellectual property rights of seed inventors and addressing related issues.

"Within the international institutions we're part of, there's another called UPOV, which oversees the intellectual property rights of inventors of new seed varieties," Ngwediagi explained, emphasizing the importance of Tanzania's commitment to protecting intellectual property in agriculture. Mr. Yole, serving as the registrar in Tanzania, oversees these intellectual property matters in alignment with the country's 2012 law, which brought Tanzania in line with the UPOV '91 convention. This alignment enabled Tanzania to become a UPOV member on November 22, 2015, marking a pivotal moment in the country's agricultural history.

Ngwediagi's involvement with UPOV extends beyond mere representation; his election as the chairman of the executive committee of this global institution in 2019 demonstrates Tanzania's active participation and leadership on the international stage. Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which necessitated a shift to online operations, significant progress has been made under his chairmanship.

The benefits of membership in international bodies such as ISTA, OICD schemes, UPOV, and FAO are manifold, particularly in attracting both foreign and local investment. The strategy of aligning with global standards has led to a visible increase in the production of quality seeds, bolstering investor confidence and facilitating international market access. "For the first time in my memory of the seed industry over the past two years, we've consistently exported seeds to Kenya, an achievement previously unattainable due to international compliance issues," Ngwediagi remarked, highlighting the strides Tanzania has made in overcoming challenges related to international standards compliance.

However, Ngwediagi believes that Tanzania has yet to fully capitalize on the opportunities presented by its government and TOSCI to facilitate seed trade. He posits that with Tanzania's abundant and conducive land, the country has the potential to export more seeds than gold. This vision is supported by a significant shift in domestic seed production; as of December 2020, 81% of seeds used in Tanzania were produced domestically, a substantial increase from 34% in previous years. This statistic challenges the misconception that most seeds are imported and underscores the tremendous progress and potential within Tanzania's seed industry.