



## **The oat community will be affected by possible changes to the conditions under which many genebanks will share germplasm for research, breeding, and education**

Axel Diederichsen, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC),  
National Focal Point for Canada to the International Treaty for Plant Genetic Resources for  
Food and Agriculture  
E-mail: [axel.diederichsen@agr.gc.ca](mailto:axel.diederichsen@agr.gc.ca)

In August 2024, an article was published in Seed World Canada to inform stakeholders about the ongoing negotiations of the Multilateral System for Access and Benefit-sharing (MLS) of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA) ([Access to Genebank Resources Could be Changing. Make Your Voice Heard](#)).

It is very likely that the Standard Material Transfer Agreement (SMTA) of the MLS used by many national genebanks and the eleven genebanks of the International Agricultural Research Centres (CGIAR) will be changed. Negotiations among the 151 member countries of the ITPGRFA are ongoing. The ITPGRFA Secretariat created a special website with background documents about the ongoing process: [The Enhancement Process | International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture | Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations \(fao.org\)](#).

A special working group, comprised of 24 regional spokespersons, stakeholder groups (from the seed industry, farmers' organizations, and civil society organizations), several observers, members of the ITPGRFA Secretariat, and reporters from the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), is working on finding compromises that meet the two main expectations:

- Enhanced benefit-sharing, including enhanced monetary benefit-sharing, by revising the SMTA so that more funds are collected from users of genebank material
- More material being made accessible for breeding, research, and education, by expanding the list of crops in Annex I of the ITPGRFA.

The objective is to complete the negotiation process of the working group so that the 11<sup>th</sup> Session of the Governing Body of the ITPGRFA that meets in November, 2025, can adopt a revised SMTA and a resolution that will lay out the process for an expansion of Annex I of the Treaty.

**The changes will be relevant to the oat community.** From 2005 to 2023, **Plant Gene Resources of Canada** distributed 24,459 seed samples of all 29 *Avena* species to genebank clients in 28 countries. Since 2008, all national and international PGRC clients have had to accept the conditions of the SMTA. The revised SMTA will not only have higher expectations regarding user payments under certain conditions, but will also have improvements, such as defining when no payments are due or whether agreements are time-limited. Users of genebank germplasm are encouraged to follow the ongoing process and make their voices heard, so that the outcomes will meet all needs.