



Press Release

ISTA Announces Formation of Strategic Advisory Panel to Guide Seed Sector Development

The International Seed Testing Association (ISTA) is pleased to announce the establishment of its **Strategic Advisory Panel (SAP)**, a new advisory body aimed at providing expert guidance on trends, developments, and strategic priorities affecting the global seed sector.

The SAP will provide the ISTA Executive Committee (ECOM) with insights on technical and social developments, training needs, industry trends, investment strategies, and growth opportunities. The panel will advise ISTA on whether and how to respond to these developments to strengthen the organisation's mission and impact.

Key Details of the Strategic Advisory Panel:

- The panel will comprise **up to 11 members**, appointed by the ECOM based on expertise and sectoral needs.
- Members will predominantly be **external experts**, including university and research scientists, policy specialists, industry leaders, government representatives, and financial experts. Additional co-opted members may be appointed for specific tasks as needed.
- A **Chair and Vice-Chair** will be selected from within the panel to provide leadership and guidance.
- Members will serve an **initial three-year term**, renewable up to six years, with staggered appointments to ensure continuity and renewal.
- The SAP will **report to the ECOM at least twice a year** and provide updates to the broader ISTA membership during the Annual Meeting.
- The panel will operate **independently of ISTA Technical Committees**, while maintaining collaboration as needed.

Profiles of Initial Members of the Strategic Advisory Panel:

1. **Innocent Namahoranye** - Chairperson, NSAR, Rwanda - **SAP Chair**
2. **Shobhana Kumar Pattanayak** - Former Secretary (Agriculture), Government of India, New Delhi, India - **SAP Vice Chair**
3. **Piergiorgio Stevanato** - Professor, University of Padua, Italy - **SAP Vice Chair**
4. **Joseph Ahenda** - Expert, AGRA, Kenya
5. **Birte Boelt** - Professor, University of Aarhus, Denmark



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ISTA Secretariat

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6. **Sarah Brunel** - Unit Lead, IPPC, Italy
7. **Garlich von Essen** - Secretary General, Euroseeds, Belgium
8. **John Hampton** - Professor, University of Lincoln, New Zealand
9. **Silmar Peske** - Editor, SeedNews; Past ISTA Vice President, Brazil
10. **Diego Risso** - Executive Director, Seed Association of the Americas, Uruguay

The Strategic Advisory Panel reflects ISTA's commitment to leveraging global expertise to guide innovation, strengthen standards, and support growth across the international seed sector. The panel will collaborate closely with the ISTA Secretariat and provide timely advice to the ECOM to ensure the association remains responsive to emerging trends and industry needs.

For more information on ISTA and the Strategic Advisory Panel, visit:

<https://www.ista.org>

Meet the SAP Members

Innocent Namahoranye, is an agribusiness leader and seed industry executive serving as a Board Member of the African Seed Trade Association and Chairman and co-founder of the National Seed Association of Rwanda (est. 2015). Over the past decade, he has transformed NSAR from a government-managed body into a fully independent, private-sector-driven association, strengthening Rwanda's integration into regional and global seed platforms, including International Seed Testing Association.

He is Owner and CEO of Agriseeds Ltd, a leading supplier of vegetable seeds and climate-smart hybrid maize in Rwanda and neighboring countries. Through its subsidiaries-Agrisol Ltd, EASI Seed Production Ltd, and Agriseeds Academy—the company promotes innovation, seed production, agrochemical distribution, and farmer training.

An MBA graduate from the United Kingdom, Mr. Namuhoranye has played a key role in seed policy and regulatory reform in Rwanda and has actively engaged with global platforms such as the International Seed Federation. He has also led major industry events, including Rwanda's National Seed Congresses, AFSTA 2025, and preparations for the ISTA Congress 2028.

Shobhana Kumar Pattanayak is a distinguished Indian civil servant and agricultural policy leader with over four decades of experience in public administration at state, national, and international levels. A former Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers' Welfare, he currently serves as Adviser to the Governor of West Bengal, India.



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As Secretary (2016–2018), he spearheaded major policy initiatives, including the launch of the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY), India’s comprehensive crop insurance scheme, the introduction of buffer stock policies for pulses, and the conceptualization of the National Year of Millets (2018), which contributed to the United Nations declaring 2023 the International Year of Millets. He also expanded the “Seeds without Borders” initiative of the International Rice Research Institute to additional countries.

Internationally, he served as India’s Permanent Representative to the Rome-based UN food agencies, holding leadership roles such as Chairperson of the FAO Committee on Agriculture and President of the Executive Board of the World Food Programme. A PhD in Food Security, Dr. Pattanayak has also led key institutions including the Administrative Staff College of India and remains an influential voice in global food security and agricultural policy.

Piergiorgio Stevanato is a Professor at the University of Padova in the Department of Agronomy, Food, Natural Resources, Animals and Environment (DAFNAE), where he has conducted research and teaching since 2015. In 2025, he was appointed Distinguished Professor at Heilongjiang University.

With over 25 years of experience in plant genetics and sustainable agriculture, Professor Stevanato specializes in sugar beet (*Beta vulgaris*), integrating genetics, genomics, stress physiology, and molecular breeding to enhance crop resilience under biotic and abiotic stresses. He has coordinated or contributed to more than 60 national and international research projects, focusing on organic farming, climate adaptation, soil biodiversity, and plant genetic resource conservation.

He has authored over 150 peer-reviewed publications, with an h-index of 30 and over 2,900 citations. His leadership roles include Editor of Sugar Beet Crops of China, Chairman of the International Sugar Beet Workshop at the Plant and Animal Genome Conference, and National Representative of the ECPGR Beta Working Group. His current research emphasizes sustainable sugar beet systems, plant–microbiome interactions, and resilient cropping strategies through participatory and agroecological approaches.

Joseph Ahenda is a seed systems and regulatory expert with over three decades of experience in Africa’s agricultural sector. He currently serves as Expert - Seed Quality Assurance & Regulations at the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa, supporting 16 countries to strengthen seed policy, certification systems, and regulatory frameworks.



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Dr. Ahenda holds a BSc in Forestry from Moi University and both an MSc in Tropical Forestry and a PhD in Agriculture and Environmental Science from Wageningen University, specialising in forest genetic resources and plant genetic resource management.

He has held senior leadership roles with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations in Somalia and the Kenya Plant Health Inspectorate Service, where he oversaw seed certification, phytosanitary services, and plant variety protection. Dr. Ahenda has coordinated seed policy reforms across multiple African countries and contributed extensively to regional harmonization initiatives, capacity building, and international standard-setting in seed systems development.

Birte Boelt is a Professor in Seed Crops and Seed Technology at Aarhus University and an internationally recognised expert in seed science, crop physiology, and sustainable seed production. She earned her agronomy degree and PhD from the Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University and has held senior research and leadership roles in Danish agricultural research since 1989.

Professor Boelt leads research on optimising yield and quality in grasses, clover, and vegetable seed crops, with a focus on crop nutrition, plant-microbe interactions, and advanced technologies such as multi-spectral imaging and near-infrared spectroscopy for seed quality assessment. Her work supports sustainable agricultural systems and policy development, including coexistence strategies for conventional, organic, and genetically modified crops.

She has published extensively in seed science and has held numerous international leadership roles, including membership in the International Seed Testing Association Advanced Technologies Committee and Seed Science Advisory Group, and past presidency of the International Herbage Seed Research Group.

Sarah Brunel leads the Implementation and Facilitation Unit (IFU) within the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC). Her unit coordinates implementation, facilitation and capacity development activities such as the production of IPPC guides and training materials, phytosanitary capacity evaluations and capacity strengthening activities to address emerging pests. Sarah's focus is on the coordination of implementation projects and management of the IFU's workplan, including staffing, budgeting, resource mobilization and strategies. She is the IPPC Secretariat's lead on One Health.

Sarah is also the secretariat's liaison with organisations such as the Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF), Centre for Agriculture and Bioscience International (CABI), Comité de Liaison Entreprenariat - Agriculture - Développement (COLEAD), the European Union and the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA).



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Sarah is an agricultural engineer from the Institut Supérieur d'Agriculture Rhône-Alpes (ISARA). She has a master's degree in international affairs and another in anthropology from Sorbonne University and the French Museum of Natural History, respectively. She has more than 20 years of national, regional and international experience in plant protection, pest and disease control policies and legislation, implementation of standards for phytosanitary measures, environmental protection and capacity development. She is a French national and speaks English, French, Italian and Spanish.

Garlich von Essen is Secretary General and CEO of Euroseeds, representing Europe's seed industry at EU and international level. He studied agriculture and economics at the University of Göttingen and later graduated in administrative and political sciences from the College of Europe.

He began his career at the European Commission (Directorate General for Agriculture) and subsequently worked in the European Parliament, focusing on agricultural, structural, and EU R&D policy. After joining the European seed sector in 1999 as Director of Public Affairs, he became Secretary General of Euroseeds in 2004.

As CEO, he leads the association's overall strategy, advocacy, and outreach, advising its Board and Executive Committee while shaping policy campaigns on key agri-food issues. He has served on the European Commission's Stakeholder Dialogue Group, sits on the Board of Trustees of the Max Planck Institute for Plant Breeding Research, and in 2025 was appointed to the European Board for Agriculture and Food (EBAF). A frequent lecturer and public speaker on EU public affairs and association management, he also farms in northern Germany.

John Hampton is Professor of Seed Technology and Director of the Seed Research Centre at Lincoln University. He completed his BAgSc and MAgSc in Plant Pathology at Lincoln College and earned a PhD in Agronomy from the University of Nottingham.

He began his career in 1974 as a Seed Pathology Scientist with New Zealand's Ministry of Agriculture at the Official Seed Testing Station. In 1987, he joined Massey University as Senior Lecturer and later Associate Professor of Seed Technology, contributing to internationally recognised training programmes for students across the Asia-Pacific region and beyond.

Since 1998, Professor Hampton has led teaching, postgraduate supervision, and major research initiatives at Lincoln University. He has delivered global seed training and consultancy programmes, including a four-year NZ Aid project in Nepal. In 2022,



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he was appointed an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit for his services to agriculture and the seed industry.

Silmar Peske is an agronomist and seed science expert with a distinguished academic and research career. He earned his undergraduate degree in Agronomy from the Federal University of Pelotas (1969-1972) and completed his MSc and PhD at Mississippi State University (1974-1983).

Professor Peske served at the Federal University of Pelotas from 1973 to 2013, conducting research and teaching in seed science and technology. He was also a Senior Research Fellow at CIAT (1986-1987) and has been the editor of SEEDnews magazine since 1997.

He has published 136 scientific papers, authored 15 books, and supervised 163 theses and dissertations. He has held leadership roles in key professional organizations, including President of ABRATES (2003-2007), Vice President of ISTA (2004-2007), and Scientific Adviser to ABRASEM.

Diego Risso is a senior seed sector executive with more than 20 years of leadership experience across the Americas, specializing in plant breeders' rights, value creation systems based on plant genetics, and regulatory harmonization. He currently serves as Executive Director of the Seed Association of the Americas, where he leads regional coordination on biotechnology, phytosanitary policy, seed treatment, and intellectual property, and represents the industry before international bodies including UPOV and International Seed Testing Association.

Previously, he was Executive Director of URUPOV, where he designed and implemented Uruguay's internationally recognized royalty system for certified and farm-saved seed, and headed INASE Uruguay, the country's national seed authority. An agronomist trained at the Universidad de la República, with postgraduate qualifications in marketing and seed technology, Mr. Risso is a frequent international speaker and consultant supporting the modernization of seed systems, PVP regimes, and regulatory frameworks throughout Latin America and beyond.

Visit the webpage of the ISTA Strategic Advisory Panel [here](#).