ISTA Secretariat
Richtiarkade 18, 8304 Wallisellen, Switzerland
Phone: +41 44 838 60 00 | Fax: +41 44 838 60 01
Email: ista.office@ista.ch
www.seedtest.org

Document OGM25-07

Strategic plan for the International Seed Testing Association 2025-2028

This document was prepared by the Executive Committee of the Association and is endorsed for discussion and consideration at the upcoming Ordinary General Meeting of the Association.

It is submitted to all ISTA Designated Authorities, ISTA Members and ISTA Observer Organisations for information prior to the ISTA Ordinary Meeting 2025.

It will be discussed and voted on at the Ordinary Meeting 2025, to be held on Friday, May 9, 2025 in Christchurch, New Zealand.

Introduction:

Founded in 1924, with the aim of developing and publishing standard procedures in the field of seed testing, ISTA now has 253 member laboratories and 163 accredited laboratories in 81 countries/distinct economies. ISTA membership is a truly global network.

The vision of ISTA is "Uniformity in seed quality evaluation worldwide". The objects of the Association are laid down in Article 3 of the Articles of the International Seed Testing Association[1] (ISTA) as a Primary purpose and Secondary purposes:

(a) The primary purpose of the Association is to develop, adopt and publish standard procedures for sampling and testing seeds, and to promote uniform application of these procedures for evaluation of seeds moving in international trade.
(b) The second purposes of the Association are actively to promote research in all areas of seed science and technology, including sampling, testing, storing, processing and distributing seeds to encourage variety (cultivar) certification, to participate in conferences and training courses aimed at furthering these objectives, and to establish and maintain liaison with other organisations having common or related interests in seed.

The strategy detailed below is aimed at implementing the primary and the secondary purposes of the Association to guarantee the continuity of the Association and to adapt to the evolutions in the environment within which ISTA operates.

Today in application of the Articles there is no doubt that the **International Rules for Seed Testing (ISTA Rules)** are the international standard reference. The ISTA Rules are recommended for national and international trade by many national regulations and international systems, such as the OECD certification seed schemes, EU regulations and many national seed laws. The seed industry also recommends the ISTA Rules in the "*ISF Rules and Usages for the Trade in Seed for Sowing Purpose*".

The ISTA Rules are supported by strong pillars built in ISTA over the years:

- strong support and input from the **Designated Authorities**, through participation in ISTA and in voting the Rules for seed testing, guaranteeing official recognition of the ISTA seed testing methods as tools for national and international regulations.
- **Technical Committees** of ISTA comprising about 300 seed experts and scientists. These develop new methods, adopt new or developing technologies, undertake validation studies that validate new methods and propose new Rules for seed testing every year that are voted on at the Ordinary General Meeting.
- **ISTA accreditation** scheme combined with the **Proficiency Test (PT) programme** guaranteeing the competency and the harmonised results of the accredited Laboratories worldwide.
- the link to **Science and Technology** which facilitates and stimulates innovative research contributing to the development of improved methods in seed sampling and testing.
- strong links to **Industry** to ensure that progress in seed testing and sampling fits the needs of the seed sector.
- the Orange and Blue International Seed Certificates that are the outcome of all that ISTA provides: expertise in seed sampling and testing, links to seed science and technologies, input of industry, and official support, all recognised by the ISTA accreditation.
- **collaboration** with other **international organisations** built over the years to help promote harmonisation to support the seed value chain.

[1] The Articles of the International Seed Testing Association (ISTA): Adopted at the 30th ISTA Congress in Antalya, Turkey on 18 June 2013, and amended at subsequent Ordinary General Meetings, these articles supersede the previous ISTA Constitution adopted at the Fourth International Seed Testing Congress in Cambridge, on July 10, 1924 and amended at subsequent Ordinary Meetings.
The current Articles were amended by vote of the ISTA Ordinary General Meeting 2021.

All these achievements require strong support in terms of:

- Time provided by the voluntary active members and non-members of the Association supported by the permanent staff of the ISTA Secretariat.
- Strong finances to support the administration of the Association (Secretariat), technical work, and method development including new technologies, the accreditation scheme and the proficiency test programme.
- Communication and training tools available for the members and available to the seed community worldwide, supported by the proactive marketing in ISTA.

ISTA must continue to fulfill the primary and second purposes laid down in the Articles, while at the same time continuing to develop ISTA beyond these basic missions. The purpose of this Strategy for 2025 to 2028 is to define the goals to implement the Articles and to propose further developments for the coming triennium. For the 2016-2019 strategy the idea was to not only plan a three-year strategy but also to look to the longer term over three triennia covering nine years, giving a global view of where ISTA wants to go. The 2019-2022 Strategy was also looking over three triennia taking into account the experience of the 2016-2019 triennia and the environment ISTA was operating in for 2019. In 2024 ISTA entered in its second century, the 2022-2025 strategy was build on the previous 100 years and in particular progress made in the previous three triennia (2016-2025). In its second century ISTA will continue to serve its growing membership by working more locally while continuing to act globally also.

The draft nine-year strategy 2016-2025 included four key assumptions that guided ISTA into the third decade of the 21st century:

1. ISTA is the leading international organisation setting and publishing seed sampling and seed testing methods for trade, national and international regulations, export and import.
2. ISTA is a leading international organisation for cooperation in building seed testing capacity and capability in all regions of the world.
3. ISTA has a consolidating role as an international accreditation body in seed sampling and seed testing recognizing competency of any laboratory or entity involved.
4. ISTA is the leading international organisation for seed science and technology where innovative research makes the link between scientific developments and applications in seed sampling and testing and enables meeting the needs of the seed sector.

The past has seen progress in all of these areas with, for example, the continued evolution of the ISTA Rules and their translation into Spanish, workshops and seminar/symposia, growth in the number of ISTA accredited laboratories, Seed Science and Technology moving to open access, virtual training programs and the plan to introduce electronic certificates. These key assumptions remain relevant for the next nine years (2025-2034).

As seen in the previous three trienniums, the current strategic plan for 2025-2028 flows from the four key assumptions above. In addition, strategic plans from the last three trienniums, defined six key goals, and associated actions, that has supported major strides toward accomplishing the general aims of ISTA. While the six key goals are unchanged the actions have been updated to reflect responses from surveys sent to members and other stakeholders in prior to the strategic plan update.

1. Goal: Develop scientifically sound rules and methods for seed sampling and testing that meet the needs of the seed sector

Planned actions:

1. Support the Technical Committees (TCOMs) to attract more contributors to the TCOMs as members through initiatives such as Young@ISTA.
2. Develop methods for new species especially tropical, sub-tropical and native species for the tests in the International Rules for Seed Testing (ISTA Rules).
3. Achieve faster availability of seed health methods. Strengthen seed health initiatives such as the Reference Pest List and Seed Health Image Database both together with external partners like the

International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) and global National Plant Protection Organizations (NPPO's)

4. Develop additional sampling methods where required (e.g. sampling of seed mixtures, small (and expensive/valuable) seed lots and for some seed health problems, e.g. where a disease may be sporadic).Develop tests and methods based on science and new technologies and facilitate the application of new or emerging technologies into current methods by supporting the work of the technical committees, encouraging membership participation in development of new tests and methods and collaborate with public and private organisations to provide the information needed for new and emerging technologies. Facilitate access to rules by encouraging translation of the ISTA Rules into more languages and developing new ways of promoting the importance of the ISTA Rules in the seed value chain.

2. Goal: contribute and develop collaborations to increase seed testing capacity and capability worldwide

Planned actions:

1. Enhance ISTA training programmes to further facilitate implementation of sampling and testing methods:

- Continue to encourage and organise training sessions including in-person workshops
- Online and digital training using current training tools and methods
- Develop capability to train trainers regionally

2. Encourage the sustainable growth of ISTA membership with a special focus on areas, where ISTA is underrepresented (e.g. Africa, Latin America, and Asia).
3. Continue marketing and promotion to attract new members especially in underrepresented areas.
4. Facilitating regionally based ISTA representatives through e.g. advocates and/or regional (liaison) offices.
5. Improve communication within the membership and stakeholders including through social media.
6. Expand partnerships with international organisations and the seed industry to build seed capacity and capabilities.

3. Goal: Strengthen the accreditation system to ensure it meets the needs of ISTA members and other stakeholders

Planned actions:

1. Maintain and develop the accreditation services, providing high quality audits and proficiency tests, and training in Quality Assurance.
2. Continue to evaluate and improve the structure and scope of accreditation for seed sampling and testing, to meet the needs of stakeholders, member laboratories and sampling entities, and relate this to the cost.
3. Continue promoting the expanded implementation and use of ISTA eCertificates.
4. Investigate options to cooperate with other accreditation bodies with the aim to improve the efficiency of the ISTA accreditation system.
5. Further expand the Proficiency Tests programme with the inclusion of new kinds of tests and species covered by the ISTA Rules.
6. Increase the number of ISTA auditors, across all regions, by supporting and improving access to training programs for potential auditors.

4. Goal: Strengthen the Science and Technology underpinning ISTA to develop innovative research to make the link between scientific developments and applications in seed sampling and testing and to allow the requirements of the seed sector to be met

Planned actions:

1. Develop mutually beneficial collaborative opportunities with other science and technology organisations.
2. Encourage the application of new and emerging technologies where appropriate in seed sampling and testing to increase efficiency and that meet the needs of stakeholders.

3. Build science capability through attracting more scientists and researchers into ISTA work either directly, through collaboration or through initiatives such as Young@ISTA.
4. Facilitate science capability through information technology such as artificial intelligence.

5. Goal: Seek the needs of members, stakeholders

Planned actions:

1. Consultation with Designated Authorities, member laboratories and industry with the aim of strengthening their role.
2. Consultation and collaboration with organisations and stakeholders involved in the seed sector with the aim of strengthening their role.

6. Goal: Manage ISTA affairs

Planned actions:

1. Promote and communicate the Association worldwide.
2. Provide tools for training and communication facilitating the technical work of the TCOMs.
3. Manage finances of the Association to provide resources to achieve the goals.