Proposed changes to seed policy are over-simplified, unworkable solutions that will ultimately fail – though an elite group of farmers may enjoy some small short term benefits.

As to seeds, all of the participating states agreed to adopt plant variety protection laws and rules for marketing seeds that better support the private sector. Despite the fact that more than 80% of all seed in Africa is still produced and disseminated through ‘informal’ seed systems (on-farm seed saving and unregulated distribution between farmers), there is no recognition in the New Alliance programme of the importance of farmer-based systems of saving, sharing, exchanging and selling seeds.

African governments are being co-opted into reviewing their seed trade laws and supporting the implementation of Plant Variety Protection (PVP) laws. The strategy is to first harmonise seed trade laws such as border control measures, phytosanitary control, variety release systems and certification standards at the regional level, and then move on to harmonising PVP laws. The effect is to create larger unified seed markets, in which the types of seeds on offer are restricted to commercially protected varieties. The age old rights of farmers to replant saved seed are curtailed and the marketing of traditional varieties of seed is strictly prohibited.

Concerns have been raised about how this agenda privatises seeds and the potential impacts this could have on small-scale farmers. Farmers will lose control of seeds regulated by a commercial system. There are also serious concerns about the loss of biodiversity resulting from a focus on commercial varieties.

**We know much more than we think’**.

|  |
| --- |
|  |
| |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | | http://mailing.wageningenur.nl/880/repository/public/images/1508/loen.jpg |  | Understanding melons  **Faster breeding thanks to smart combination of techniques**  Smart new combinations of state-of-the-art molecular techniques mean that breeding programmes can be accelerated dramatically: it may soon take only two years instead of the current five or ten to develop a new variety. DNA sequencing data can already be associated directly with important hereditary traits such as disease resistance, taste and shelf life. “Without this level of understanding breeding programmed have been time-consuming and not very specific, By properly analyzing the information from the sequence data, breeders can now carry out much more focused searches for desired properties and create far more focused combinations of breeding parents. This knowledge is worth a great deal and we’re currently   |  | | --- | |  | | |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | http://mailing.wageningenur.nl/880/repository/public/images/1508/appelschurft2.jpg |  | Testing new biological plant protection products for effectiveness and practical feasibility  A naturally occurring fungus codenamed ‘H39’ might be the long-sought biological defence against the dreaded apple scab. “This fungus has not only been tested for its ability to fight the pathogen. The new Select Bio Control method was also used to immediately assess the practical feasibility of deploying it as a commercial product | | |