

The International Tobacco Growers' Association 2023 Americas Regional Meeting in Salta, Argentina discusses the main challenges facing the sector

Tobacco growers' representatives from five countries – Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Dominican Republic and USA gathered in Salta, Argentina for the International Tobacco Growers' Association (ITGA) 2023 Americas Meeting. The event was attended by regional and international stakeholders and focused on the pressing challenges facing the sector. During the event, participants have flagged the World Health Organization (WHO) Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) tenth Conference of the Parties (COP), taking place in Panama later this year, as a major concern.

Since the outbreak of the global pandemic the pressure on tobacco growers has seriously intensified. Farmers have been carrying an additional burden given the fact that they cannot operate from home and have to be on the fields to sustain the main pillars of the industry. At the same time, growers' viability is consistently going down, with skyrocketing costs of production, stagnated pricing, and ever-increasing regulatory pressures.

As a result, member associations of ITGA urge for their governments' protection in order to survive. The ITGA urges international institutions to respect tobacco growers, who are a legitimate party through their representatives, and include them in global debates where their future is being decided.

During the Regional Meeting, a key discussion point was the WHO FCTC and COP10. Tobacco growers call to attention the lack of transparency and representation of the sector. Since COP4 in 2010, meetings have not been held in public as it is stated in the WHO FCTC own rules of procedure.

The Open Session was initiated by the Minister of Production and Sustainable Development, Dr. Martin de los Rios, while the President of the ITGA, Jose J. Aranda, the President of the Camara del Tabaco de Salta, Esteban Amat Lacroix and the National Secretary of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, Jorge Solmi, also addressed the delegates underlying the importance of tobacco growing in Argentina.

Jose J. Aranda, highlighted the steps Argentinian growers have taken to ensure the livelihoods of local farmers. Mr. Aranda underlined the multitude of threats facing tobacco, including cost of production and climate issues, and the stigmatization of the sector which operates within a legal market and complies with all the regulations imposed on it. The sector is disappointed with the lack of progress regarding FCTC's Article 17 and the representation of tobacco growers at the COP meetings.

Mercedes Vázquez, ITGA CEO, recognized the pioneering spirit of Argentinian tobacco growers and their substantial contribution to local economies. Among the country specific measures that make Argentina stand out is the Special Tobacco Fund, a unique entity that has enabled tobacco growers to make a dignifying margin of their production.

Tobacco growers demand to be included in the discussions and policy evolution and protection from governments to promote adequate measures that may affect growers' livelihoods. The ITGA also requests the WHO FCTC to carry out a realistic implementation of Article 17 and focus on countries highly dependent on tobacco.

During the Open Session, the global regulatory environment was examined in detail by Michiel Reerink, Alliance One International Corporate Affairs Director & Managing Director, while Benjamin Dessart, Universal Leaf Vice President of External Affairs, presented an in-depth review of the latest legislative initiatives in the Americas Region.

The event provided a comprehensive overview of the global tobacco market from different perspectives. Ivan Genov, ITGA Manager Tobacco Industry Analysis, outlined the major threats and opportunities for growers. These include the growing costs of production, political and economic uncertainty, but also the current disequilibrium of supply and demand for tobacco leaf and the prospects of diligent growers going into the future.

During the Closed Session of the Meeting, ITGA member associations shared the latest crop estimates and discussed the most urgent issues in their respective markets. Special attention was paid to the situation in the host country, Argentina, where out of control inflation is causing serious obstacles for growers. Argentinian associations also showcased a number of sustainability initiatives they have focused on to tackle social and environmental issues. Last, growers' representatives from the Americas agreed that they will have to work in close cooperation in order to tackle the increasing challenges the sector is facing.