External Review of the Crop Trust

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CROP TRUST

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External Review of the Crop Trust

Dear Colleagues, Partners, and Stakeholders,

The Executive Board commissioned an independent external review earlier this year to provide an objective analysis of the Crop Trust's governance and leadership, programme impact, and organisational effectiveness and efficiency. The review assessed the organisation's achievements over the past decade and offers forward-looking guidance for the next five years. We are pleased to share a copy of the external review report, which summarises the findings of this assessment, together with the Management and Executive Board responses.

The review confirms the strength of the Crop Trust's achievements to date, highlighting that it is a well-governed, highly effective, resilient, and globally respected organization, demonstrating clear impact in conserving and improving the plant genetic resources for global food security. It also recognises the significant progress made in recent years towards fulfilling its comprehensive constitutional mandate, while identifying constructive recommendations to further strengthen the organisation over the coming years.

The Executive Board is grateful to the external reviewers for their thorough analysis, constructive recommendations, and thoughtful reflections. We also extend our appreciation to all staff, partners, and stakeholders who contributed their time and insights to the process. Your engagement has been invaluable.

The Executive Board and the Management of the Crop Trust accept the findings of the review and consider its recommendations constructive and well aligned with the organisation's current priorities. The resulting action points will be followed up in the Board's 2026 meetings.

With sincere gratitude for your dedication and ongoing commitment to our common goal.

Catherine Bertini
Executive Board Chair

Stefan Schmitz
Executive Director

Crop Trust External Review - Final Report

November 2025

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Background and Purpose of the Review

The external review of the Crop Trust was commissioned by the Executive Board and undertaken by SRI Executive, an independent consultancy specializing in organizational performance and strategic assessments in the global development sector. The review aimed to assess the organization's achievements over the past decade and provide forward-looking guidance for the next five years. Its objectives were to assess the Crop Trust's governance and leadership, program impact, organizational effectiveness and efficiency.

A rigorous mixed-methods approach was applied, including stakeholder surveys, interviews with internal and external partners, review of key documentation, and analysis of program outcomes. The evaluation provides evidence-based insights into the Crop Trust's contribution to global food security and the sustainable management of plant genetic resources, as framed under Article 15 of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA) and SDG Target 2.5.

Key Review Findings

The **Crop Trust is found to be a highly effective, resilient, and globally respected organization, demonstrating clear impact in conserving and improving** the plant genetic resources for global food security.

According to its Constitution, the Crop Trust has the objective to secure long-term conservation and availability of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture (PGRFA). To this end, the Crop Trust is mandated to safeguard collections of unique and valuable PGRFA held *ex situ*, with priority being given to those collections that are either included in the list of 64 crops covered under the Multilateral System (Annex I to the International Treaty) or held by international institutions (as referred to in Article 15.1(b) of the International Treaty). Also to this end, the Crop Trust is mandated by its Constitution to promote an efficient goal-oriented, economically efficient and sustainable global genebank system; promote the regeneration, characterization, documentation and evaluation of PGRFA and the exchange of related information; promote the availability of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture; and promote national and regional capacity building, including the training of key personnel, with respect to the above. In addition, the Crop Trust's Constitution explicitly points to the need to strive for a balance between support for collections held by national institutions and support for collections held by international institutions, and the balance between regions.

Through appropriate strategic decisions, the Crop Trust has achieved considerable success in recent years in fulfilling this comprehensive Constitutional mandate. The **Crop Trust has expanded significantly in size and scope over the past decade, reflecting strategic priorities in both the 2014–2024 and Food Forever 2030 plans**. The organization has increased focus on time-bound project activities (most notably in Food Forever 2030) and on system-wide services. However, the cornerstone of the Crop Trust's work remains financial mechanisms to support the essential operations of international genebanks. While Crop Trust's increased focus on system wide services has been received positively, feedback has been more mixed about Crop Trust's role in supporting national genebanks. The review found that the Crop Trust has added value to national genebanks, but there are opportunities to further strengthen implementation especially if the Crop Trust intends to continue scaling.

The Crop Trust is found to be a **well-governed organization**. Its governance framework includes a clearly defined Executive Board supported by three specialized sub-committees—the Finance,

Risk and Audit Committee (FRAC), the Investment Committee (IC), and the Governance and Nominating Committee (GNC). These structures ensure targeted expertise, informed decision-making, and strong oversight. Additionally, the Donors' Council provides a unique platform to enhance financial sustainability. That said, there is an opportunity for further engagement from members of the Donors' Council to realize additional value both for the Donors and the Crop Trust.

Program Effectiveness and Impact

The **Crop Trust's programs have demonstrated high relevance, effectiveness, and measurable impact.** Program support is delivered through three main mechanisms which are found to be highly integrated and mutually reinforcing.

Over the past twenty years, the Crop Trust has disbursed **USD 76 million in Long-term Partnership Agreements (LPAs), Long-term Grants (LTGs), and other supplementary genebank grants.** LPAs and LTGs provide critical financial stability for international genebanks, enabling them to maintain routine operations, upgrade infrastructure, and manage key crop collections. Partners consistently report that these funds are **essential lifelines** and **they would struggle to secure similar support from other funding sources**. Results are demonstrated across all LPAs/LTGs, most notably increases in accessions conserved and distributed which illustrate the direct positive impact of the Crop Trust's financial support on global conservation capacity.

The Crop Trust has assumed responsibility for system-wide services previously funded by the Genebank Platform (ended in 2021) and thereby addressing a critical gap in the global system. These services include quality and risk management systems (QMS), technical oversight, performance monitoring, and data management tools such as GRIN Global Community Edition (GGCE) and Genesys. Since 2021, these activities have been largely funded through the Endowment Fund, providing stable, long-term support to both international and national genebanks, a decision that has been well received and validated in this review. **System-wide services have strengthened global standards, built technical capacity, improved data management, and informed global crop conservation strategies, ensuring coherence and sustainability in ex situ conservation efforts**.

The Crop Trust intensified its focus on time-bound support during this ten-year period, as per current Strategic Goal 2, Strategy 2030: Food Forever. By 2024, circa USD 347 million had been raised for targeted initiatives since the Crop Trust's inception. This funding supports strengthening global system capacity, including national genebanks. National partners are highly appreciative of Crop Trust's support. On partner satisfaction surveys, national genebanks rated Crop Trust's relevance to their priorities 4.8 out of 5 in relevance to their priorities.

Overall, **partners expressed strong satisfaction with the support provided by Crop Trust**. 100% of respondents agreed that Crop Trust adds significant value to the conservation of crop genetic resources through its work and partnerships. Many partners highlighted the **technical support** they received for different crops as highly valuable. 95% of respondents agreed *(2.5% neutral, 2.5% disagree)* that their organisation has a strong, collaborative relationship with Crop Trust and qualitative comments reinforced the respondents' strong appreciation for their partnership with the Crop Trust. Building on this positive feedback, system level and international genebank partners expressed a desire for further collaboration. International genebanks reported that they would value greater engagement in project design and implementation. In this vein, the Crop Trust could benefit from the development of technical partnership policies and guidelines.

Contribution to Impact

The Crop Trust supports activities that facilitate the long-term *ex situ* preservation and use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture, in line with the ITPGRFA. The preservation of genetic diversity, including landraces, crop wild relatives, and modern varieties, is essential for breeding resilient crops and is aligned to SDG Target 2.5. SDG Target 2.5 emphasises the importance of genetic diversity for ending hunger and promoting sustainable agriculture.

The Svalbard Global Seed Vault represents a cornerstone of the Crop Trust's global influence. By 2024, it safeguarded 1.3 million accessions, up from 320,000 at launch. The **Vault has strengthened global insurance for crop diversity**, exemplified by the successful reconstitution of ICARDA's Aleppo genebank at different sites during the Syrian conflict. Beyond safeguarding collections, the **Crop Trust has facilitated the distribution of germplasm at scale**, supporting research and breeding programmes. In 2023 alone, over 200,000 samples were distributed by CGIAR genebanks, **80% to low- and middle-income countries**. The **Crop Trust's support has enabled downstream agricultural innovations, directly contributing to food security and economic benefits**. Examples include the CIP Victoria potato variety in Uganda, wild wheat breeding programs by CIMMYT and ICARDA, and IRRI rice breeding programs. Economic analyses estimate returns on investment in genebanks at 40–60%, highlighting the high cost-effectiveness of Crop Trust's support to genebanks and demonstrating value for money for donors' investments.

The Crop Trust has raised global awareness of crop diversity and the importance of conservation. The Svalbard Vault has emerged as a compelling communications tool, consistently cited by partners as a symbol of the organization's mission. The Crop Trust is recognized as an essential element of the funding strategy of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, advancing coordination, efficiency, and standards within the global conservation system.

Organizational effectiveness and efficiency

The Crop Trust's financial management, overseen by the Executive Board and guided by robust policies, has shown steady growth between 2015 and 2024, with **annual income rising from USD 28 million to USD 51 million and the Endowment Fund increasing from USD 157 to USD 357 million**. This growth has enabled expanded long-term genebank support, the initiation of new long-term partnership agreements, and project work to support both International and national genebanks. The Endowment Fund, largely supported by governments (95.4%), now finances 54% of genebank grants, up from 10% in 2015, while project funding, supported primarily by major donors like Germany and Norway remains vital.

During the period of this review, **the global development landscape has experienced severe disruption,** most notably the dismantling of USAID and commitments across ODA donors to further reduce foreign assistance and aid budgets, accelerating the retreat from multilateralism and heightening geopolitical uncertainty. This has triggered a rapid decline in official development assistance (ODA), with the OECD projecting a further 9–17% reduction in 2025 following a 9% drop in 2024.

Against this backdrop, the Crop Trust has **launched its 2025 Fundraising Strategy**, **maintaining ambitious goals for the Endowment Fund of USD 625 million by 2030 and USD 850 million** in the longer term to secure sustainable endowment financing for global crop diversity. These targets are outward-facing, designed both to align with the Crop Trust's mandate and to highlight the scale of financing gaps. However, given the current landscape and average annual fundraising performance to date, the review finds that achieving the 2030 target will be challenging.

Nevertheless, 2024 was the most successful year in terms of resource mobilization, which included USD 37.7 million in contributions to the Endowment Fund and a strong program of

activities of USD USD 18.2million which includes the Global Genebank Partnership. The Executive Board has expressed strong confidence in the Crop Trust's resource mobilization capabilities; **100% agreed that "the organization effectively mobilizes funding and donor support."** Staff perceptions, however, were more mixed, with just 48% agreement *(31% neutral, 21% disagree)*. These recent fundraising results point to growing confidence. Key enablers of success include strong donor relationships, the Crop Trust's professionalism, responsiveness, and alignment with donor priorities, as well as robust policies and practices that build stakeholder confidence.

Historically however, the Crop Trust, though an "essential element of the Funding Strategy of the International Treaty" has lacked a robust overarching fundraising strategy for much of 2015–2024. While fundraising activities and action plans were implemented, there was no unified framework articulating funding goals, targets, and assumptions. Staff feedback during this review highlighted a lack of strategic coherence and frequent shifts in priorities, contributing to reduced focus and execution challenges. Alignment on funding priorities also remains mixed: only 42% of staff agree that there is an appropriate balance between endowment and project fundraising (*30% neutral, 28% disagree*), a sentiment echoed by external stakeholders.

Finally, **the staff of the Crop Trust are widely regarded as one of the organisation's greatest strengths.** Across all data sources, including staff and partner surveys, and genebank interviews, **there was consistent praise for the professionalism, commitment, and technical expertise of the team**. The partner survey highlighted particularly positive views of the Programme team. 97% of respondents agreed that "the support provided by the Crop Trust is highly relevant to my organisation's current needs and priorities," *(3% disagree)* and 87% agreed that "the Crop Trust fosters a culture of mutual respect and trust in our partnership" *(10% neutral, 3% disagree)*. Genebank managers interviewed during the review uniformly spoke highly of the Crop Trust staff they had interacted with. Internally, staff expressed similar appreciation for their peers. The staff survey and focus group discussions referenced high levels of professionalism, mutual respect, and strong team dynamics. Using this momentum, there **is opportunity to strengthen internal communication and ensure that the Crop Trust continues to invest in fostering a positive culture**.

Forward looking guidance for the next 5 years

The review details numerous actionable recommendations, many of which are tactical. The key strategic recommendations and guidance include:

Fundraising and Financial Sustainability: The Crop Trust should move swiftly to implement the 2025 Resource Mobilization Strategy, supported by a robust framework to measure and track progress and recognizing the agility and adaptability required for this strategy given shifts in the landscape. As greater clarity emerges on the scope of national genebank support and the operating model required for delivery- as well as any cost implications for strengthening Crop Trust's work across all Goals (e.g. partnership approaches) the fundraising strategy should be revisited and adjusted accordingly. This review should also take into account potential shifts in the organization's cost structure, for example, how income from the Endowment Fund is allocated across different areas of work or changes in core funding to ensure long-term financial sustainability.

Project Work and Clarity of Ambition: The Crop Trust is at an early stage of scaling time-bound support (Crop Trust indicated the ambition to grow this work, at least in the short term). Greater strategic clarity is needed regarding the scope of national genebank support, pathways for achieving objectives, and operational models for sustainable delivery. As the Crop Trust seeks to scale this work, it should articulate a clear ambition aligned to the specific, unique benefit that it can offer national genebanks and supported by an appropriate operating model.

Partnership: While the Crop Trust maintains strong existing partnerships, there is opportunity, and in the case of scaling project work, the need, to strengthen and crystallise Crop Trust's approach to technical partnership. This includes developing commitments, accountability and partnership management frameworks. While it is recognised that the Crop Trust is a small and effective team, the capabilities and resources for implementing the Crop Trust's future partnership policy should be included in any operating model improvement.

Introduction

This document presents the final findings and recommendations prepared by SRI Executive as part of the external review of the Crop Trust.

The external review assignment was commissioned by the Crop Trust Executive Board in line with Article 17 of the Constitution and conducted by SRI Executive, an independent consultancy specializing in organizational performance and strategic assessments in the global development sector. The Terms of Reference (ToR) and review scope were refined collaboratively with the Crop Trust during the inception. The review is divided into two areas of focus: an in-depth assessment of the past ten years and a forward-looking analysis for the next five years. As per the ToR, the scope of work is detailed as focusing on:

Governance and Management of the Crop Trust:

- Review the governance structures and management practices
- Assess the effectiveness of leadership and organizational oversight

Programmatic Work of the Crop Trust:

- Evaluate the strategic direction, quality, and effectiveness of programmes
- Assess programme partnerships, impact, and pathways to achieving impact

Overall Effectiveness and Efficiency:

- Review the current endowment investment strategy
- Assess administration, finance, human resources, risk management, and business continuity
- Evaluate resource mobilization and communication strategies

Findings and recommendations draw on a broad evidence base (further detailed in the methodology section), including over 100 documents reviewed, multiple rounds of stakeholder consultations, and data collected through interviews, surveys, and workshops. While specific references are provided where possible, much of the insight stems from confidential and anonymous sources to ensure candid input and a balanced perspective.

This report represents the final report in a clearly defined reporting timeline. Subsequent versions will respond to corrections from the Crop Trust's Steering Committee and Executive Board.

Methodology

This review employed a rigorous mixed-methods approach to assess the Crop Trust's strategic direction, governance, program impact, and organizational effectiveness over the past decade. Combining qualitative and quantitative evidence from internal and external stakeholders, the methodology emphasized triangulation, validation of findings, and inclusive engagement to ensure robustness. Developed by SRI Executive in line with the ToR and agreed with the Crop

Trust during the inception phase, it aligned with the three core workstreams of the review and drew on both primary and secondary data.

Stakeholder input has been anonymized to protect confidentiality and encourage candour. Where direct attribution was not possible or appropriate, findings are presented thematically, supported by multiple corroborating inputs.

Primary Data Collection

- A total of 42 one-on-one interviews were conducted with a broad cross-section of stakeholders, including 26 internal participants (staff across all levels, Executive Board members, and Donors' Council representatives) and 16 external stakeholders such as international and national genebank partners.
- Four interactive **virtual focus groups and workshops** were held with internal Crop Trust staff. Participants were drawn from across functions and seniority levels.
- Three **in-person workshops** were held in Bonn; a two-day workshop with the Programmes Team, a three-hour session with the Leadership Team; and a 1-day Leadership Team workshop focused on testing emerging recommendations, including stress-testing their alignment with the Crop Trust 2030 Strategy.
- Four **targeted anonymous surveys** were distributed to key stakeholder groups: Crop Trust staff, Executive Board members, Donors' Council representatives, and Crop Trust partners. Together, these generated over 100 responses, providing quantitative and qualitative insight. Each survey was tailored to its audience and included Likert-scale statements ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Respondents selecting "agree" or "strongly agree" are reported as agreeing with a statement, and vice versa. "Not applicable" options were excluded from final analysis to ensure focus on relevant responses. Demographic data was collected for internal trend analysis but not reported in any way that could identify individuals. With the exception of the Donors' Council survey, all surveys achieved statistically meaningful participation levels. Regarding the Donors' Council, the planned method of engagement was a survey, which achieved a 23% response rate despite multiple follow-up efforts, including reminders and direct outreach by the Crop Trust. One Donors' Council member was also interviewed. While the survey provided useful perspectives, the results are not used to infer group-wide conclusions.

Survey	No. Invited	No. Responded	% Response Rate
All Staff	53	44	83%
Partners	61	39	64%
Exec Board	11	7	64%
Donors' Council	62	14	23%

Figure 1 Survey responses and response rate by stakeholder group.

Secondary Data Collection

Secondary data collection included comprehensive documentary review. Over 100 documents were reviewed, including strategy and planning documents, governance records, internal and external evaluations, Board and Donor Council minutes, financial and audit reports, annual reports, and internal policies spanning the past decade.

Where relevant, findings from previous external consultancy reports were taken to be endorsed by the Crop Trust, where no management statement existed to refute them. In cases where SRI

Executive was the provider of earlier inputs, this review was conducted by an entirely independent team to preserve objectivity and minimize risk of bias.

While the review team made every effort to ensure a comprehensive and balanced evaluation, a number of **limitations** are acknowledged:

- Scheduling challenges, among external stakeholders such as potential donors, limited participation in some cases. This was partially mitigated through surveys.
- Although efforts were made to engage the Donor Council, their participation was limited, and therefore their perspectives are only partially reflected in this review.
- While SRI Executive independently identified target stakeholder groups and requested broad representation, the review depended on the Crop Trust to facilitate introductions and provide access to relevant contacts and documentation. Though this collaboration was constructive and transparent, it introduces the potential for selection bias, albeit not observed as a concern in this case.
- Some documentation, especially from the earlier years of the review period, was incomplete or unavailable, limiting the ability to conduct full trend analysis over the ten-year period. Examples include meeting minutes from the Donors' Council pre 2016, consistent indicator data for strategy result areas, detailed resource mobilization data e.g. proposals/bids submitted and win rates. In addition, variation in how some data, particularly financial and Endowment Fund data has been reported and presented over time may have constrained the consistency and depth of analysis in these areas.
- The use of anonymized inputs, while essential for honest dialogue, means that some insights could not be linked to specific roles or groups.
- It is noted that some organizational changes are underway within the Crop Trust such as implementing a new performance management system, and an internal process review. These changes have not yet been completed. Therefore, while acknowledged, are not subject to evaluation at the time of the review.

Despite these limitations (which are typical in reviews of this nature), the diversity of data sources, the range of stakeholder input, and the rigorous validation process provide a robust and credible foundation for the findings and recommendations presented in this report.

Crop Trust's Strategic Direction

Since its inception, the **Crop Trust has expanded both in scope and scale, aligning with its mandate to contribute to a sustainable global system for the *ex situ* conservation of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (PGRFA**), as set forth in the 2001 International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA). Throughout this period, the organisation has faced critical junctures where key strategic decisions have shaped its direction to date.

Over the past 20 years since becoming a legal entity in 2004, the strategic direction of the Crop Trust has evolved significantly, focusing on expanding its scope, strengthening partnerships, and increasing global awareness of the importance of conservation of plant genetic resources. These changes are embedded as core elements within the current 2030 Strategic Plan Food Forever. In 2006, the Governing Body of the ITPGRFA recognised the Crop Trust as an essential element of the funding strategy of the Treaty. In 2004, time-bound project work of the Crop Trust was initiated to support through funding from the Grains Research & Development Corporation (GRDC)[1] that was followed by funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) to support activities that included the regeneration and safe duplication of threatened priority

[1] 2004 Crop Trust Annual Report

collections, backing up important collections in the Svalbard Global Seed Vault, upgrading selected genebanks, promoting the use of diversity through evaluation and pre-breeding, developing improved methods to conserve vegetatively-propagated crops, and developing information systems for better management and access to collections, .that later evolved as Genesys and GRIN Global CE[2]. Depositing 320,553 seed collections in Svalbard Seed Vault marked the start of a long-term partnership with the Vault, which has been critical in ensuring the safeguarding of critical crop genetic resources globally.

In 2010, as part of Crop Trust's expansion into time-bound project implementation, the Crop Wild Relatives (CWR) project funded by the Norwegian government built upon the previous activities of the BMGF initiative. 2012 saw the change in Executive Director from Cary Fowler to Marie Haga and the ushering in of the 2014–2024 Strategic Plan. The Plan emphasised the building of a rational and cost-effective global system for the conservation and availability of crop diversity that is efficient and sustainable. This would be achieved through building the EF to USD 850 million by 2018 to provide perpetual funding to key collections with the prioritizing of growing the endowment over short-term projects (Crop Trust, 2013). Crop Trust moved from Rome, Italy to Bonn, Germany in 2013 and celebrated its 10th anniversary in 2014. In 2014, Genesys reached 2.77 million records and GRIN-Global was deployed in three pilot projects to improve genebank data management.

The **critical value of the Svalbard Global Seed Vault was demonstrated in 2015. The International Centre for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA)** retrieved 38,073 samples from the V ault to reconstruct its collection in Morocco and Lebanon after having to abandon its headquarters in Aleppo, Syria due to the civil war, clearly demonstrating the effectiveness of the Vault and the ability of regenerating the collection that had been stored at low temperatures. 2016 - 2017 ushered in the transition from the CGIAR Genebank CRP (2012-2016) to the CGIAR Genebank Platform (2017-2022) both led by the Crop Trust marking a shift to a hybrid agenda within Crop Trust as both a funder of genebanks and an implementer, including leading a significant CGIAR initiative.

This also coincided with the launch of a flagship initiative of the Crop Trust, the Food Forever Initiative, that aimed to raise awareness and drive action to meet the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Target 2.5: Maintain the Genetic Diversity in Food Production, which focuses on maintaining agricultural biodiversity. The initiative engaged governments, private sector stakeholders, and the public to advocate for the conservation and use of agricultural biodiversity, ensuring resilient food systems for future generations.

2018 marked the 10th anniversary of the Svalbard Global Seed Vault and the granting of the first Long-term Partnership Agreement (LPA) with the International Rice Research Institute's (IRRI)[3] rice genebank. The current Executive Director, Stefan Schmitz was appointed in 2019 along with the launch of the project Seeds4Resilience to support five national genebanks. Whilst the global pandemic in 2020 disrupted activities within the Crop Trust and its partners, work continued with a new project that supported pre-breeding in grasspea and finger millet. 2021 saw the early closure of CGIAR Genebank Platform, the end of the Crop Wild Relatives Project (CWR), and the launch of the Biodiversity for Opportunities, Livelihoods and Development (BOLD) Project.

It also saw the launch of the Emergency Reserve for Genebanks to provide rapid funding for genebanks in crisis. Five new global crop conservation strategies (brassicas, peppers, eggplant, peas and peanut) were completed and a further two updated (potato and sorghum). The sweet potato project was launched in 2022. Crop Trust's Strategic Plan under the "Food Forever" vision

[2] 2007 Crop Trust Annual Report

[3] IRRI entered the first LTG with the Crop Trust in 2006

to 2030 was developed and the Global Crop Diversity Summit held in November 2023. New LPAs were established with the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) and the Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT. In addition, the BOLDER (Building Opportunities for Lesser-known Diversity in Edible Resources) project was launched at the 28th Conference of the Parties (COP28), and the Svalbard Global Seed Vault celebrated its 15th anniversary. In 2024 the Crop Trust celebrated its 20th anniversary, whilst AfricaRice became eligible for a Long-Term Partnership Agreement (LPA) starting in 2025.

Key strategic decisions 2015-2024

Two key strategic decisions were identified in this review as key decisions/shifts in the timeframe of 2015-2024, these are I) the intensification of project work/time bound support and II) the decision to fund system wide services from the Endowment Fund.

Intensification of time-bound support: The Crop Trust has significantly evolved its approach to time-bound projects, focusing on broader goals and innovative strategies to address urgent challenges in crop diversity conservation. It should be noted that this diverges from the strategic intention under the 2014-2024 Strategic Plan where reducing a focus on projects was a key element in the strategy in favour of a greater focus on growing the Endowment Fund.

During this review period, the growth and intensification of project-based initiatives from a single project (CWR) in 2015 to 4 Projects (Seeds4Resilience, BOLD/ER, Power of Diversity Funding Facility (PDFF), and Global Crop Conservation Strategies (GCCS)) at the end of 2024 is notable. This expansion in project-based initiatives has been driven by addressing gaps in the global conservation system and is aligned to the Crop Trust's constitution and mandate. In terms of strategic direction, the decision to intensify project work has been met with a mixed response.

Project work is line with the Crop Trust's constitution and mandate. It not only supports the Crop Trust to deliver its mandate, but amplifies also the work that the Endowment Fund supports and strengthens the overall visibility of the organization. Importantly, it offers donors a mechanism to provide short-term funding and align with donor priorities in achieving results as well as investing in the in-perpetuity funding of global crop diversity conservation. To this end, the intensification of **project work has provided synergy and alignment**, further strengthening the Crop Trust's position and value-add.

Moreover, national genebanks, the key participants of project work, are positive about Crop Trust's project work, reporting that it addresses critical gaps for them, both in terms of financial and technical support. Furthermore, national genebanks report feeling more connected to the global system, both as part of an international network and through access to platforms such as Genesys. A more mixed response to the intensification of project work was shared by other technical partners consulted for this review. Concerns they shared relate to Crop Trust's unique value addition for national genebank project work and a further concern that the intensification of projects has resulted in a lessening of focus on growing the Endowment Fund, which they perceive as the primary purpose of the Crop Trust. It should be noted that the review finds that the Crop Trust's project work is both relevant and effective and contributing to impact (see section Program Impact below), these shared opinions and perceptions may point to a need for strengthened communication and engagement of these partners in national genebank support.

Certain **trade-offs of the intensification of project work have been noted by Crop Trust stakeholders**. While project work is clearly relevant, has been delivering results and has also increased visibility of the Crop Trust, this evolution of strategic direction also comes at a cost. Key issues noted by staff are the workload has significantly increased and staff are

overstretched, organizational headcount has grown and a consequent perception that the Crop Trust is less nimble, (conversely Crop Trust's relatively small size has also been noted as a strength in terms of agility) and furthermore the team reports that at times the quality of Crop Trust's work has been compromised by doing too much at once. Staff also noted a key risk was that lesser attention and focus is on the Endowment Fund. Furthermore, the intensification of project work, is making a commitment to evolving towards an implementation agency, therefore requiring a set of capabilities and systems that can be distinct to a funding agency and also requiring thoughtful consideration of balancing the roles of both funder and implementing partner.

Decision to fund system wide services from the Endowment Fund

In terms of strategic direction, the decision to fund system wide services from the Endowment Fund has been received positively. The Trust has embraced digital transformation as a key component of its strategic direction, leveraging technology to enhance the conservation and use of crop diversity. In 2021, the Crop Trust made the decision to finance key system wide services from the Endowment Fund, stepping into the gap created by the cessation of the Genebank Platform and making further progress towards delivering its mandate and strategic goals. The extensive benefits of this decision are further reflected in the Programme Section of this report.

External stakeholders were less aware of this decision (as it is more internal and operational) and perspectives were not shared or obtained in terms of potential trade-offs. Staff noted the key trade-off of this decision is that less money is available from the Endowment Fund for LPAs/LTGs, however given the rationale for the decision and the benefits of system wide services in contributing to the global system of ex-situ conservation and contribution to the Crop Trust's mandate, this trade-off is acceptable. Risks in relation to managing the sustainability of these systems are noted as potential risks for Crop Trust to manage into the future.

Section 1: Governance and Management

1.1 Governance

Governance Framework and Responsibilities

The **Crop Trust is governed by a clearly defined Executive Board, with roles and responsibilities explicitly formalized in its Rules of Procedure** and is in full alignment with the organization's Constitution. Supporting the Board's work are three specialized sub-committees that ensure targeted oversight and expert input across key areas: the Finance, Risk and Audit Committee (FRAC), the Investment Committee (IC), and the Governance and Nominating Committee (GNC). The FRAC is responsible for overseeing the organization's financial integrity, including strategic financial planning, audit and accounting policies and risk management. The IC focuses on the oversight of the Endowment Fund, advising on investment strategy, monitoring financial and investment risk, and reviewing the performance of the outsourced Chief Investment Officer. The GNC leads on governance practices and Board composition, including oversight of institutional policies, compliance with governance standards, and succession planning. This committee structure reflects governance best practice for organizations of similar size and complexity, supporting the Executive Board in maintaining effective oversight while ensuring that decisions are well-informed, strategically aligned, and compliant with institutional mandates.

The Executive Board holds a central governance role within the Crop Trust, with responsibilities spanning strategic direction, oversight, policy approval, and performance monitoring, as outlined in provisions of Article 6 3(a) to 3(t) of the Constitution. Available evidence suggests the Board

is actively fulfilling these core functions in practice. As evidenced through Executive Board meeting minutes, the Board approves the Crop Trust's annual Programme of Work and Budget, adopts financial and investment policies, and monitors their implementation through structured committee oversight (FRAC, IC, GNC). It also oversees risk exposure and cost-effectiveness, appoints the Executive Director, and reviews strategic plans and reports, including the Annual Report. Recent examples include:

- Contingency Planning: The Executive Board initiated and reviewed contingency documents in response to global uncertainties (e.g., during the 2020 global Covid-19 pandemic), demonstrating strategic responsiveness.
- Fundraising Oversight: The Board has approved fundraising campaigns and is tasked with reviewing associated policies (although performance monitoring mechanisms remain underdeveloped, further outlined in the Board Performance, Culture and Skills section).
- Endowment Fund Oversight: The Executive Board approves the Investment Policy. Through the Investment Committee, the Board provides informed oversight of endowment fund management and investment policy compliance.
- Executive Director Accountability: The Board is responsible for appointing and evaluating the Executive Director's performance and is reported to be actively engaged in that process.
- Stakeholder Engagement: Board meetings are at times aligned with major international events to foster global engagement, in line with its mandate to report to and consult with the ITPGRFA's Governing Body and the Donors' Council.

Governance policies and documentation are well-established and aligned with the Crop Trust's constitutional framework (as per Article 6 2 (o)), supporting sound governance practices. This includes adopting clearly articulated Rules of Procedure for the Executive Board and its sub-committees, contributing to clarity of roles and decision-making structures. While the current framework meets governance standards and provides a strong foundation, opportunities remain to further strengthen governance maturity, particularly through formalizing limits on delegated authority (the specific decision-making powers the board passes on to leadership and vice versa) and enhancing clarity around accountability mechanisms. For example, the delegation of authority between the Executive Board, the Executive Secretary, and senior management does not exist in clear documentation (beyond financial limits). As the Crop Trust grows in size and complexity, adopting practices used by peer organizations (such as a Delegation of Authority Matrix) would help clarify when Board involvement is required, for instance in decisions relating to the use of endowment fund drawdowns for new activities or commitments above certain thresholds. Such clarity would enhance efficiency, transparency, and accountability, while allowing management to act decisively within agreed parameters and the Board to focus on strategic and high-risk issues.

The Donors' Council is a constitutionally mandated advisory body within the Crop Trust's governance framework, established under Article 10 to support the Executive Board. Its purpose is primarily to advise on fundraising and financial matters, as well as to offer a platform for donor perspectives and contribute to financial oversight of the Crop Trust's operations. While the Council does not hold formal decision-making authority, it does appoint members to the Executive Board and has the potential to play a strategically important role in fostering alignment between donors and the Crop Trust's objectives. Per the Constitution, the Donors' Council is composed of public and private donors from both developing and developed countries who have

made significant contributions to the Crop Trust. The Council is expected to meet at least annually and is empowered to set its own procedures and elect its Chairperson.

Despite the potential of this governance body, the Council's practical impact has been limited by fluctuating levels of engagement and attendance. A review of historical data from 2015 to 2024 confirms that the Council has met biannually as required, but with highly variable participation. Attendance ranged from as low as 8 external members in October 2018 to a peak of 29 in October 2020 and November 2023. While online formats during the pandemic temporarily boosted numbers, average participation remains modest. Out of 37 eligible individual members (excluding observers), the median number of donor council attendees across 17 meetings held between 2018 and 2024 was approximately 23. While this suggests a reasonable core of consistent participants, it also highlights untapped potential for broader and more strategic involvement from the full Council.

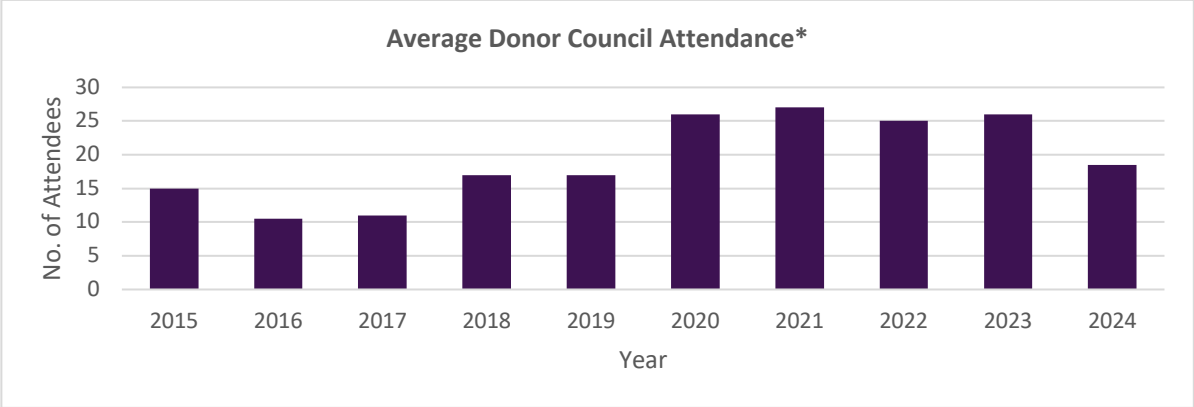

*Figure 2 Donor council attendance, 2015-2024. *Where two meetings occurred within a calendar year, the average number of attendees is calculated and reported.*

The Crop Trust has made notable efforts to strengthen Donors' Council participation. These include scheduling meetings alongside high-level global events, and offering hybrid formats to increase accessibility. Despite these efforts and a strong Chair in place, engagement challenges persist. Internal perspectives reflect this: only 50% of Crop Trust leadership agreed that the Donors' Council plays a meaningful role in advancing the organisation's mission. Additionally, the survey distributed to Donors' Council members during the external review process recorded only a 23% response rate, underscoring a lack of responsiveness. Qualitative feedback from the review highlights the presence of "dormant" Donors' Council members; participants who remain formally affiliated with the Council but who do not actively contribute.

Board Composition and Diversity

Board composition aligns with the Crop Trust's constitutional requirements in Article 5 1, providing a solid foundation for effective and balanced governance. The Constitution mandates that the Executive Board includes appointments from a diverse set of stakeholders: four members appointed by the Governing Body of the ITPGRFA (at least two from developing countries), four by the Donors' Council (at least one from a developing country), and one non-voting technical representative each from FAO and CGIAR. It also mandates that the Executive Director of the Crop Trust acts as a member *ex officio* and that two additional Board members may be appointed to ensure diversity in disciplinary backgrounds, gender, geographical representation, and competencies in areas such as fundraising and financial management. These requirements are found to be met in the composition of the Board in 2024. The current FAO and CGIAR appointees were found to bring valuable institutional perspectives, technical expertise

and demonstrate active engagement in Board deliberations, enhancing the overall quality of strategic governance.

Board Performance, Culture and Skills

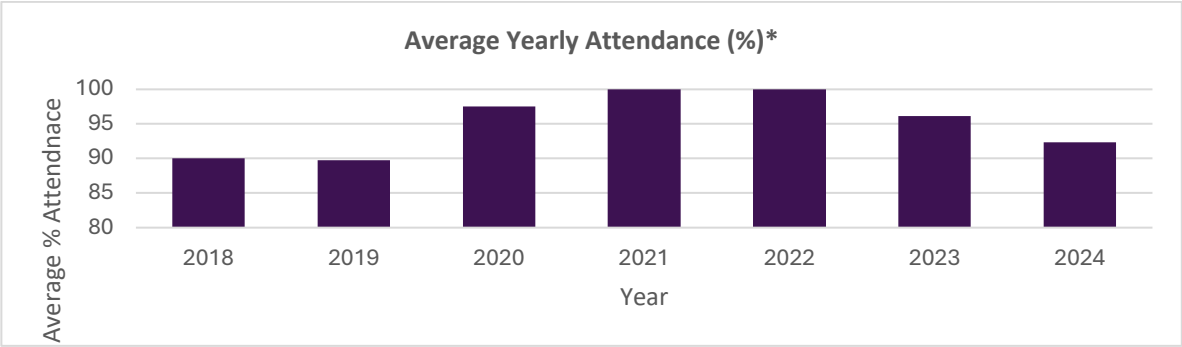

*Figure 3 Average yearly attendance of Board meetings, 2018-2024. *Where multiple meetings occurred within a single year, the average number of attendees has been calculated and reported.*

The Executive Board demonstrates a consistently high level of engagement and commitment. Between 2018 and 2024, attendance rates at Board meetings have remained robust, with all meetings exceeding 80% participation and many reaching full attendance (100%). This sustained involvement reflects the Board's strong dedication to the Crop Trust's mission. Survey data reinforces this, with 100% of Executive Board members strongly agreeing that the organisation's focus on crop genetic resource conservation is vital to achieving global food and nutrition security. Board members are not only present but actively contribute during meetings, which are periodically convened in international locations to coincide with key stakeholder events, further strengthening strategic alignment and external visibility.

The Executive Board brings a strong and relevant mix of expertise across governance, organisational leadership, agricultural science, policy, and research. These are the core areas aligned with the Crop Trust's strategic mission. Financial and risk oversight is supported through established committee structures. However, given the scale and complexity of the Endowment Fund, there is an opportunity to strengthen Board-level investment knowledge and oversight to ensure robust stewardship of the organisation's most critical financial asset. Alongside investment skills, those in enterprise-wide risk management and business continuity planning would also be beneficial.

While the Executive Board is currently functioning effectively, with strong attendance, active engagement, and positive working relationships reported among members and with the Executive Director, there remains an opportunity to formalise performance oversight. The absence of structured Board evaluations and clearly defined key performance indicators (KPIs) limits the organisation's ability to systematically assess governance effectiveness or identify areas for improvement. At this stage, it is understandable for organisations of similar size and mandate to not have fully formalised performance evaluations. However, introducing periodic, tailored reviews aligned with the Crop Trust's strategic priorities would enhance governance practices and promote continuous improvement. As the organisation grows and its complexity increases, formalizing these evaluation processes will be important to strengthen accountability and ensure the Board's ongoing effectiveness.

1.2 Oversight and Risk Management

The Crop Trust has put in place foundational internal controls and risk management processes that are deemed fit for its current size and operating context. These include core mechanisms for financial oversight, compliance, and risk identification. As the organisation grows and its

operational environment becomes more complex (especially if focus on national genebank project work continues or intensifies), these systems will need to be further strengthened to ensure continued effective oversight and risk mitigation. While generally sound, some areas warrant attention as part of future organisational development.

Independent assessments, including PKF Littlejohn's gap assessment conducted specifically for an EU Pillar Assessment and Rehber Consulting's subsequent 2024 engagement on developing an internal audit function for the Crop Trust, have identified the absence of an internal audit function as a gap in the Crop Trust's governance and internal control system. The report argued that missing function represents a gap in the organisation's adherence to the internationally recognised Three Lines Model of risk management, where internal audit provides the essential third line of defence: objective, independent assurance free from management influence and they noted particular areas for strengthening around some control dimensions, including risk assessment, monitoring and partner accountability.

While a detailed review of audit and control was not the purpose or scope of this review, some findings corroborate the Rehber report regarding opportunities to strengthen monitoring and partner accountability. This review finds that the Crop Trust currently sits at Level 2 – *Developing* on SRI Executive's governance maturity framework, which assesses institutions on a four-point scale from initial to leading. At this level, governance systems such as risk policies, oversight mechanisms, and Board processes are in place and are appropriate and proportionate to the organisation's current complexity. In 2024, FRAC agreed that an internal audit function was not required at this stage, a decision that this review finds to be **a sound and proportionate assessment given the Crop Trust's current scale, scope, and governance maturity**.

However, as the Crop Trust may grow in terms of programme scale and financial complexity, the associated fiduciary and operational risks are likely to increase. In these circumstances, the organisation would typically be expected to progress to Level 3 – Established, at which point the introduction of an internal audit function would become relevant (SRI Executive, 2025). Conditions signalling readiness for such a function include a higher volume or diversity of funds, expansion of operational programmes or partnerships, and greater external expectations for accountability and transparency. In this context, good governance practice would also involve structured embedding of risk policies into decision-making, clear and documented ownership of accountability functions and Board evaluations, structured disclosures, and proactive mechanisms to manage compliance and ethics.

Currently, there is no formal process to determine when or under what conditions these measures should be implemented. Without periodic reassessment or predefined maturity benchmarks, it remains unclear when the Crop Trust will consider implementing an internal audit function. Establishing clear triggers or review timelines (such as revisiting recommendations annually or upon reaching defined operational milestones) would ensure that key governance enhancements are addressed proactively. This approach is further detailed in the recommendations section of the report.

The Endowment Fund operates under an Outsourced Chief Investment Officer (OCIO) mandate. The Executive Board sets the overall investment policy and strategic objectives for the Fund, with day-to-day investment management delegated to the appointed OCIO. Oversight of this arrangement rests with the Investment Committee, which provides strategic direction and monitors performance on behalf of the Board.

Risk management at the Crop Trust has evolved notably over the review period. The organisation first appointed a compliance staff member in 2013, and this capacity has since grown to two dedicated compliance professionals as of 2021. Importantly, these roles now sit structurally

independent from other teams in the Crop Trust, reflecting alignment with good governance principles and international best practice.

Improvements are visible across several areas: risk matrices have become more granular, with clearer risk definitions, tailored mitigation measures, and structured updates are now presented to the Executive Board. Compliance monitoring has expanded to include biannual updates from other teams and an increased number of spot checks and compliance visits to partners. However, due to financial and capacity constraints and no 'on the ground' resources, the scale of such activities remains limited, and comprehensive coverage of all implementing partners is not currently feasible.

Recognizing the growing complexity of compliance requirements, particularly in managing relationships with diverse national genebanks, the Crop Trust has begun to invest in building compliance capacity across its partner network. For example, a technical session on compliance was held at the 2024 BOLD Project workshop in Dubai, and compliance training for genebanks is under development.

While the Crop Trust is currently meeting compliance requirements, there are signals that future demands given the growth ambition of the Crop Trust will require a more advanced and scalable approach. Donor requirements vary, and as the Crop Trust diversifies its funding, applying consistent compliance frameworks across partnerships becomes increasingly complex, particularly given the differing legal, financial, and operational capacities of an increasingly diverse portfolio of partners. Additionally, frequent no-cost extension requests place added pressure on already stretched compliance resources.

Looking ahead, particularly if work with national genebanks increases, the Crop Trust will need to strengthen its compliance capacity to keep pace with its expanding and more diverse portfolio. This includes defining a scalable compliance model that aligns assurance efforts with risk exposure and operational realities. Establishing clear triggers (such as portfolio size, project complexity, or risk thresholds) for when to expand or adapt compliance mechanisms will be essential to ensuring the function remains fit for purpose as the organisation grows.

1.3 Leadership Effectiveness, Communication, and Development

Strategic Direction and Accountability

Crop Trust's **leadership demonstrates a clear degree of accountability to the Executive Board**, reflected in its responsiveness to governance direction and its delivery of key requests. For example, contingency planning documents requested by the Board in March 2020 were subsequently developed and shared, evidencing follow-through on critical oversight areas. Similarly, the implementation of an annual organisational workplan has supported internal alignment and offered a structured mechanism for translating strategic direction into operational priorities.

This responsiveness also **reflects a healthy governance dynamic**, in which the Board actively engages, and leadership appropriately responds. This is an essential foundation for effective oversight and mutual accountability.

However, accountability mechanisms could be further strengthened. One notable example where accountability mechanisms were not fully embedded is the approval of a USD 3 million allocation from reserves for a fundraising campaign. This decision was a pivotal moment for the organisation and aligns to the Crop Trust's strengthened focus on resource mobilization. It followed a thoughtful discussion at the Executive Board, and there has since been some retrospective follow-up. However, at the time of approval, the campaign lacked clearly articulated success criteria, KPIs, or defined reporting intervals. These are tools that are essential

for tracking progress, assessing return on investment (ROI), and ensuring transparency. While 2024 was the most successful fundraising year in the Crop Trust's history, it remains unclear to what degree the campaign contributed to this success. . This lack of clarity weakens the ability to extract lessons for the future and evaluate whether similar campaigns should be pursued again. Internally, staff frequently reported limited understanding of the campaign's objectives, timelines, and financial allocations. A perceived lack of visible progress and updates has further undermined staff buy-in to the campaign. When approving strategic investments (especially those drawn from reserves), it is best practice to embed structured accountability from the outset. This includes defining clear KPIs, setting timelines, and building in regular accountability checkpoints from the outset.

As the Crop Trust continues to grow, **further institutionalizing performance measurement and reinforcing accountability mechanisms will be important**. Closing the loop between Board directives and leadership reporting strengthens transparency, strategic responsiveness, and governance maturity.

Communication and Transparency

Internal Crop Trust staff feedback highlights some areas for strengthening in leadership communication and transparency. Only 37% of staff feel leadership effectively communicates organisational priorities, (*33% neutral, 30% disagree*), 20% find decision-making clear (*39% neutral, 41% disagree*), and 30% believe roles and responsibilities are well understood (*26% neutral, 34% disagree*). **Confusion is especially evident around key initiatives, such as the fundraising campaign and the organisational focus on fundraising for the Endowment Fund versus project work**. While Directors' briefings post-Executive Committee meetings are appreciated, they have not fully addressed these issues. 57% of staff stated they are confident in the leadership's ability to lead the organization into the future (*26% neutral, 17% disagree*).

A **clear perception gap also exists between governance and staff regarding strategic direction, fundraising, and resource management**. Only 28% of staff see the Crop Trust's fundraising strategy as effective *(36% neutral, 36% disagree)*, versus 57% of Executive Board members agreeing *(43% neutral)*. Similarly, while 100% of Board members believe resources are managed efficiently, only 50% of staff agree (*24% neutral, 26% disagree*). This divergence reflects challenges in internal communication, limited transparency, and the absence of clearly documented goals, performance indicators, and progress tracking. In particular, the lack of a robust fundraising strategy in the review period contributes to staff uncertainty and scepticism.

Succession Planning and Leadership Development

The Crop Trust shows clear commitment to leadership development through structured training programs. In 2024, 22 senior staff participated in a comprehensive leadership and management training, including psychological safety workshops and individual assessments (MBTI, EQ360). Leadership self-assessments indicate confidence and support for continuous development, with 100% of senior leaders feeling equipped to lead effectively. To strengthen organisational resilience, succession planning should be formalised and broadened in parallel with continued leadership development efforts. While formal succession planning remains underdeveloped, it has recently gained visibility on the Board's agenda, and there appears to be a clear commitment to advancing this work.

Section 2: Programme Impact

The Crop Trust aims to achieve this by: financially supporting collections of unique and valuable plant genetic resources for food and agriculture held in 13 international genebanks globally, thereby supporting the conservation and diversity of crops as set out under Article 15 of the

International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA) and to ensure access to and use of this diversity as a global public good (FAO, 2009). The 13 genebanks include 10 held within the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) centres, the Centre for International Forestry Research and World Agroforestry (CIFOR-ICRAF), World Vegetable Centre (WorldVeg), and Centre for Pacific Crops and Trees (CePACT), along with the Svalbard Global Seed Vault managed by NordGen; promoting the regeneration, characterization, documentation and evaluation of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture and the exchange of related information; ensuring unimpeded access to plant genetic resources for food and agriculture; supporting and promoting national and regional capacity building for genebank personnel; and promoting an economically efficient, goal-oriented and sustainable global system of genebanks, in accordance with the ITPGRFA.

By operating within the framework of ITPGRFA, the Crop Trust explicitly contributes to the Sustainable Development Goal Target 2.5[4]. To achieve these goals the Crop Trust focuses on long-term, predictable funding through its Crop Diversity Endowment Fund, targeting an Endowment Fund of USD 625 million by 2030, and growing to USD 850 in the future. Furthermore, through its Endowment Fund the Crop Trust contributes to the operations of the Svalbard Global Seed Vault, a fail-safe storage facility for crop diversity.

The findings of this section are grounded in an assessment based on the methodology as outlined above. This is followed by a discussion of the Crop Trust's programmatic relevance, effectiveness, partnerships, pathways to impact through an assessment of the current theory of change, and how impact is defined.

2.1 Programmatic Relevance

Strategic Relevance

A recent call by laureates of the World Food Prize highlights the urgent need for research, innovation, and bold action to address the worsening food insecurity crisis (World Food Prize Foundation, 2025). Pressures on global food security have been intensifying: the global population is predicted to increase by 1.5 billion by 2050; climate change is expected to reduce the productivity of major staples, including maize, particularly in Africa (Kipkulei et al., 2025); and extreme weather events, soil erosion, land degradation, biodiversity loss, water shortages, and restrictive policies further exacerbate food production challenges (CGIAR, 2024a). Rising food demand, projected to increase by 30–62% by 2050, further amplifies the urgency for effective global responses (van Dijk et al., 2021).

Over the period 2015–2024, the Crop Trust has pursued a strategic agenda focused on safeguarding the long-term conservation and availability of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture. Its work during this period has supported ex situ genebanks worldwide, strengthened global crop diversity systems, and enhanced capacity and technical standards, thereby addressing emerging challenges to global food security. **By aligning its core work with its constitutional mandate, including Article 2.2a on the safeguarding of unique and valuable plant genetic resources, the Crop Trust has maintained relevance and impact across diverse stakeholders and geographies.**

[4] SDG Target 2.5: By 2020, maintain the genetic diversity of seeds, cultivated plants and farmed and domesticated animals and their related wild species, including through soundly managed and diversified seed and plant banks at the national, regional and international levels, and promote access to and fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge, as internationally agreed. https://sdg.esa.int/target/25-maintain-genetic-diversity-seeds-cultivated-plants-and-farmed-and-domesticated-animals-and

Building on this foundation, **the 2030 Strategic Plan translates the Trust's constitutional mandates into actionable strategies and measurable goals**. The Plan reinforces capacity building, financial sustainability, and global partnerships while integrating other priorities such as climate resilience, biodiversity protection, and institutional effectiveness. In doing so, it **both adheres to and advances the constitutional objectives, ensuring the Trust's continued strategic relevance in safeguarding crop diversity for global food security**.

Over recent decades, ex situ conservation has expanded globally to protect plant genetic resources for food and agriculture (PGRFA). Genebanks now preserve genetic material from major crops, their wild relatives, minor crops, and wild food plants (FAO, 2025). These collections store traits that are critical for climate adaptation and global food security through the development of resilient agrifood systems (Kliem and Sievers-Glotzbach, 2021).

These traits are critical for breeding new crop varieties that can withstand extreme weather events and shifting climate conditions, thereby increasing crop diversity to reduce the risk of large-scale crop failures due to pests, diseases, or climate shocks. This diversity serves as an insurance policy for global food systems. Given the indispensable role of genebanks in conserving crop diversity and supporting climate-resilient agrifood systems, the programmatic work of the Crop Trust is highly relevant to global food security needs.

By providing long-term, stable funding to international genebanks covering a proportion of essential operational costs, the Crop Trust supports the management of globally important crop collections and **supports Article 2.2a of the Crop Trust's Constitution**, which tasks the Crop Trust with safeguarding collections of unique and valuable plant genetic resources held *ex situ*, with priority given to those under the International Treaty. Partnerships with international genebanks through LPAs and LTGs are particularly relevant: it is estimated that globally there are 852 national genebanks in 116 countries, 4 regional genebanks, and 13 international genebanks, making a total of 869 crop genebanks (FAO, 2025). This is down from 1,750 crop genebanks reported previously[5] (Dempewolf *et al.*, 2023; FAO 2010). Approximately 13.9 percent[6] of the total global germplasm accessions are held in the 10 CGIAR genebanks (FAO 2025) of which all 10 are supported by the Crop Trust.

International genebanks are a global public good that contribute to crop improvement, climate change adaptation, and global interdependence for both developing and developed economies. The work of the Crop Trust to raise quality standards through investments in upgrades to infrastructure, training and technical support for international and national genebanks is therefore crucial in improving the management of crop collections that safeguard global food security, conserve biodiversity, support sustainable agricultural development, and thus support the goals of the ITPGRFA (through Article 15) and SDG Target 2.5.

The fundamental role of the Crop Trust is in addressing gaps in crop genetic diversity and systems and supporting international collections held in genebanks. This is achieved through the main programmatic areas of support to international genebanks, system wide services, and project work and support to national genebanks. Notably, reflecting on the strategic focus of the organisation across these areas of engagement, 100% of external partners, staff and Executive Board members surveyed agreed that the "*work on crop genetic resource conservation is a relevant area of focus to achieve current and future food and nutrition security*", demonstrating clear global thematic relevance for internal and external stakeholders.

[5] Note the difference in numbers of genebanks is associated with the overall definition of what constitutes a genebank.

[6] Total number of accessions held in all genebanks globally is 5,941,616; CGIAR genebanks hold 823,080 accessions which is equivalent to 13.9%

Furthermore, the contribution of genebanks to breeding programmes that enhance the genetic diversity of agricultural production systems demonstrates the relevance of the Crop Trust's work to global food security. The Crop Trust's assistance to partners has supported work on pre-breeding programmes that introduce traits of wild relatives and landraces into breeding lines to maintain genetic diversity for future needs (Smale and Jamora, 2021). Additionally, promoting the use of digital tools and databases, such as Genesys and the ITPGRFA's Global Information System (GLIS), improves documentation and accessibility of genetic resources, helping identify and address gaps.

Overall, **the work of the Crop Trust and its strategic priorities is aligned to its Constitution and is relevant in the context of global food security**, contributing to the financial sustainability, improved practices, and system-wide services and collaboration for the *ex situ* conservation of crop diversity for food and agriculture.

Project-Based Relevance

The overall relevance of project-based work is predicated on capacity building; providing training on quality management systems, data management, and operational standards, as exemplified by the Seeds for Resilience and BOLD projects that have focused on strengthening national genebanks. This **aligns with Article 2.2e of the Crop Trust's Constitution and is reflected in the 2030 Strategic Plan**, which emphasizes strengthening genebank capacity and technical capabilities to meet international standards. The Plan directly operationalizes the constitutional mandate by outlining actions to enhance overall genebank performance and institutional effectiveness.

Projects that the Crop Trust undertakes appear to be well thought-out and built on experience and learning. The focus and objectives of projects are found to be relevant. One national genebank reported that "t*he Crop Trust is on the right track with BOLD*" and the average scoring of the statement "*The support provided by the Crop Trust is highly relevant to my organisation's needs and priorities*" scored a 4.8 out of 5 by national genebank partners. That said, the identification of projects and partners (i.e., gaps or challenges to address) is usually through a top-down approach (using global or regional level research and the Global Action Plan/Global Conservation Strategies/ guided by donors), there may be ways to strengthen targeting and selection such as a staged approach of having global targeting criteria, regional targeting criteria and genebank/collection targeting criteria and project identification through consultation of national genebanks e.g. using a FAO consultation process.

2.2 Effectiveness

Long-term Partnership Agreements (LPAs) and Long-term Grants (LTGs) with International Genebanks

At the core of the Crop Trust is an Endowment Fund, created **in line with Article 3.1 of the Constitution** to provide financial security to globally important collections of crop diversity in perpetuity[7]. To date, the Executive Board has approved long-term funding from the Crop Trust Endowment Fund for the essential operations of the 10 CGIAR genebanks, the Centre for International Forestry Research and World Agroforestry (CIFOR-ICRAF), the Centre for Pacific Crops and Trees (CePaCT), all of which are Article 15 collections, and of the World Vegetable

[7] FAO and the Future Harvest Centres of the CGIAR are promoting the establishment of a Global Crop Diversity Trust, in the form of an endowment with the objective of providing a permanent source of funds to support the long-term conservation of the *ex situ* germplasm, including characterization, documentation, evaluation and exchange of related information, knowledge and technologies, on which the world depends for food security, to operate as an essential element of the Funding Strategy of the ITPGRFA, with overall policy guidance from the Governing Body of the ITPGRFA, and within the framework of the ITPGRFA. *Source: Agreement for the Establishment of the Global Crop Diversity Trust* *https://www.croptrust.org/fileadmin/uploads/croptrust/Documents/Policy_Documents/Establish-Agreement-english.pdf*

Centre (WorldVeg). This financial mechanism **directly operationalizes the constitutional mandate by ensuring that key collections are maintained over the long term**. The Endowment Fund also supports the running costs of the Svalbard Global Seed Vault (see Section 2.3).

As the focus of Article 15 of the ITPGRFA and a significant beneficiary of the Endowment Fund, the CGIAR has built the largest global network of crop collections listed under the Multilateral System, managing over 823,080 accessions representing 35 crop species (FAO 2025), which account for 95% of germplasm distributed under the ITPGRFA (Smale and Jamora, 2021). These collections are supported financially through direct public sector funding, by private donors including foundations and, crucially, by the Crop Trust Endowment Fund. Within the context of the Endowment Fund, the international genebank collections (10 CGIAR centres covering 11 genebanks, ICRAF, WorldVeg and CePACT) are supported through two funding mechanisms, Long-term Partnership Agreements (LPAs) and Long-term Grants (LTGs).

Importantly, all support through LPAs and LTGs to international genebanks is aligned with the implementation of the ITPGRFA. LTGs and LPAs are provided to support the essential operations of genebanks. These grants are designed to ensure the long-term conservation and availability of genetic resources in genebanks, covering activities such as storage, regeneration, health testing, and distribution of germplasm. Long-term grants (LTGs) provide support for a portion of the essential operations of a genebank in relation to the specific crops supported as per agreement. Once genebanks achieve performance standards, they become eligible for LPAs which fund the major portion of essential operations. As of November 2024, there were 9 centres with active LTGs and 3 with active LPAs with the Crop Trust.

The LPAs and LTGs demonstrate an effective mechanism to support achievement of Crop Trust's mission and current Strategic Goal 1[8]. Positive results of Crop Trust's support through LPAs and LTGs can be demonstrated across all recipient genebanks. Specific examples shared were: one international genebank described that "Crop Trust's financial assistance in the last three years has been helpful to sustain minimal routine Genebank activities at a time when the Genebank had no other funding", highlighting the crucial importance of sustained Crop Trust funding. Another international genebank described LTG funding as a "key funding stream" that provided security, and that during the period of the agreement accessions had risen from 2,100 to 2,500. Furthermore, collaboration through the Genebank Platform has been described with international genebank partners as "very solid" and based on a "strong community".

Issues of concern and areas for improvement with regard the LPAs and LTGs noted as part of this review are in relation to the amount of financial support available for LPAs and LTGs and the level of reporting required from genebanks in line with LPA/LTG.

Key issues in relation to LPAs and LTGs

Foundational to achieving Goal 1 is Crop Trust's performance in relation to achieving the USD 625million by 2030 target Endowment Fund. As the Endowment Fund is currently at USD 357million, it is unlikely that the Endowment Fund will achieve the 2030 target, nor the target of yielding USD 25 million annually required to meet the long term funding needs of Key results area 1 under the Goal 1 of the current strategy, detracting from the Crop Trust's effectiveness.

A key criterion for a genebank to enter into a LPA with the Crop Trust is that the genebank must first meet certain performance targets. The Crop Trust implements a programme of activities,

[8] 2030 Strategy: Strategic Goal 1: By 2030, the Crop Trust will provide long-term financial assistance for the essential operations of all genebanks that have signed agreements with the Plant Treaty under Article 15, and of additional genebanks that hold unique, globally significant crop diversity collections in the Multilateral System, meet agreed performance standards, and require external funding

including the quality management system (QMS), training and other technical support to strengthen the capacity of the genebanks and to reach these targets. Partners report the capacity strengthening programmes as excellent and very helpful. Some concerns and perceptions were shared that the Endowment Fund is not at the level to support new LPAs, potentially undermining the capacity strengthening efforts. There is currently one case of a genebank eligible for an LPA, but the Endowment Fund is not at a sufficient level

In relation to expectations of level of support provided by LPAs there are further issues. The level of financial support that would be provided through an LPA was based on a costing study that was carried out in 2018. At this time, the LPA financial support was targeted at 80-90% of total essential operations for each genebank. The expectation that LPA's should support 80-90% of essential operations exists amongst genebanks, despite costs having since risen rendering the 2018 figures obsolete. Genebanks report discontent with this growing mismatch of expectations and actuals.. This may detract from the Crop Trust's credibility or undermine its efforts to strengthen quality standards.

These issues point to the importance of robust financial goal target setting along with improved communications with stakeholders, that are both ambitious and feasible and aligned to achieving the Strategy and robust and consistent communications with key stakeholders. Going forward the Crop Trust would benefit from setting more specific targets under Goal 1, costing these targets and revising and iterating based on market opportunity and strengthening communications with the relevant stakeholders.

Reporting on LPAs and LTGs

Monitoring and evaluation and genebank reviews are generally regarded positively by international genebanks and are seen as an opportunity for assessment and improvement. **The Crop Trust carries out monitoring of all genebank operations (as opposed to proportional reporting on funding received) in order to collect and report data on the performance of the global system as part of its contribution and requirements under the ITPGRFA**- a critical function and role of the Crop Trust.

However, feedback shared by genebanks as part of this review, describe the reporting requirements of the Crop Trust as burdensome or "heavy, duplicative and resource-intensive" (as the reporting is disproportionate to the funding received due to the Crop Trust's requirements under the ITPGRFA). Genebanks did not seem aware the level of reporting required was to aligned to ITPGRFA requirements. Furthermore, genebanks note that they are also required to report to the CGIAR through the Accelerator, a reporting format that was developed by the Crop Trust, including much of the information required for Crop Trust reporting. That being said, the Crop Trust is nonetheless working to streamline its reporting and support greater genebank efficiency.

To help alleviate these perceptions and frustrations, perhaps the Crop Trust should include this context and further detail on reporting requirements as part of partnership policy development and include also in LPA/LTG agreements, as well as ensuring this is effectively communicated.

System-wide Services

Crop Trust provides system-wide services to the global genebank community through support to quality and risk management systems (QMS) and data management tools such as GRIN Global Community Edition (GGCE) and Genesys. Crop Trust also aims to raise quality standards of genebanks globally by providing technical oversight, monitoring performance standards and ensuring compliance with international agreements including the ITPGRFA and, as a partner working closely with CGIAR, FAO, and the ITPGRFA Secretariat, strengthening the global system

for plant genetic resource conservation. Moreover, the Crop Trust has contributed to policy development and compliance, supporting CGIAR genebanks in meeting international obligations under the ITPGRFA.

Since 2021, the system-wide services provided by the Crop Trust have in part been funded through the Endowment Fund. This has provided stable funding to support the development of systems that have been difficult to fund through bilateral funding sources. System-wide services have played a vital role in supporting international genebanks and more recently, national genebanks. Other than independent oversight of the CGIAR Genebank Platform, ensuring strategic leadership and effective management, the Crop Trust has supported the development of tools that include Genesys and GRIN-Global Community Edition (GGCE) to enhance data management and accessibility for genebanks. **It also provided expertise in quality management systems (QMS) and supported the adoption of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) across genebanks.** The Trust has organised training programs, such as the Genebank Operations and Advanced Learning (GOAL) workshops, to raise genebank standards and has facilitated Communities of Practice (CoPs) to foster collaboration and knowledge exchange among genebank staff. Largely, the roll out of GOAL activities and CoPs is through project delivery. Furthermore, the Crop Trust has provided training and capacity-building initiatives that have helped national genebanks improve their operations and align with international standards. Furthermore, the Crop Trust carries out annual surveys for some of the system services it provides to capture feedback and learning from continuous improvement of these supports.

System-wide services provided by Crop Trust are highly appreciated and demonstrate positive results. The Trust's impartiality as an independent entity providing system-wide services is viewed as desirable, ensuring unbiased support for genebanks. These services, including QMS and Genesys, have been effective in supporting genebanks globally and have been described as essential for maintaining high standards in genebank operations and facilitating data management and accessibility. Tools provided through the services are useful to genebanks, improving information management and accessibility and are appreciated for their role in supporting genebank operations and providing a centralised resource for data. One genebank noted that the data management services “has added so much value to our genebanks”.

The **recognition of the Crop Trust’s work to raise quality standards within the genebank ecosystem is well established**. International and national partners have commented that Crop Trust has contributed technical assistance, IT support and staff capacity building that help meet international genebank standards – in all, offering support beyond simply the role of a donor. For one genebank, technical and quality standards support from Crop Trust helped ensure they met standards to become a recognised international genebank, including meeting necessary financial standards. Support for implementing global standards is recognised by genebanks as a distinct added value beyond financial support, especially in matching national processes to global standards, and by other partners as raising the global standard of science. 92% of external partners surveyed agreed with the sentiment that “Recommendations arising from Crop Trust reviews are a helpful tool to strengthening the quality of operations in our gene bank” *(8% neutral)*; **97% of partners agreed that “The Crop Trust's support has strengthened my organisation's ability to improve the quality of crop genetic resource conservation**.” *(3% neutral)*; and 91% agreed that “The tools, resources, and training provided by the Crop Trust have had a direct positive impact on improving the quality of crop genetic resource conservation within my organisation” (*9% neutral)*. In sum, these results demonstrate a clear value add of technical assistance in raising quality standards. This is underpinned by a sense of strong technical quality and expertise within the Crop Trust teams, in some cases a source of world-class technical excellence.

Genesys also clearly demonstrates positive results. Genesys serves as an online portal for managing and sharing data on genebank accessions, including passport data and other relevant information. It is used to record and update the availability status of accessions in national and international genebanks and facilitates data publication providing a centralised platform for users to explore genetic resources. By the end of 2024 there were 4.2 million accessions uploaded to Genesys, demonstrating its utility in managing genetic resources (Crop Trust, 2024a). As shown in Figure 4, the samples logged on Genesys have increased steadily since 2018, demonstrating a particularly notable rise between 2019 and 2020. This sustained growth suggests increasing roll-out with partners and stable management of the system. For example, one international genebank commented that "the Crop Trust has made a huge impact in the way we manage information, how we can collaborate as a team… and how we connect to our users". Moreover, 87% of genebanks surveyed found the information available to be "up to date and relevant*" (13% neutral)*.

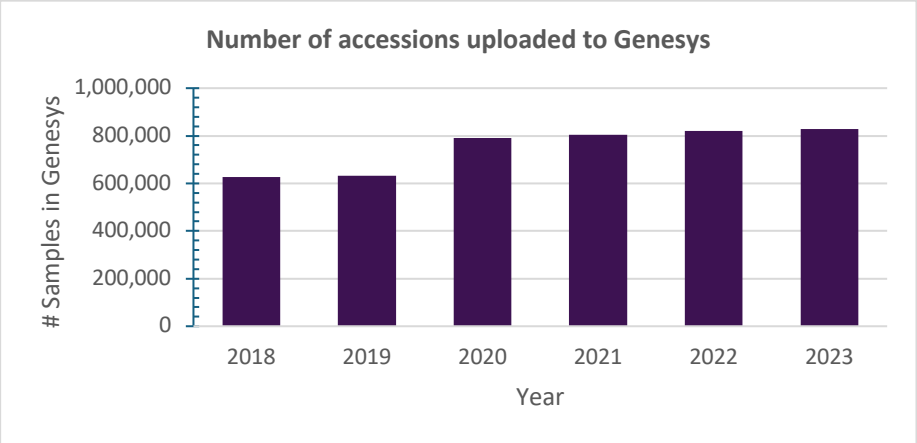

Figure 4 Number of accessions data uploaded to Genesys. Data provided by Crop Trust M&E.

Key issues for strengthening system-wide services are in relation to adoption and sustainability of the services

For systems such as Genesys and GGCE, challenges noted are the uneven adoption of the system and ensuring data quality and ongoing maintenance. National genebanks particularly struggle with adoption of the systems due to lack of resources and high turnover. While all genebank partners reported using the platform regularly, national genebanks rated the statement 'We use the Genesys platform regularly' at an average of 3.70, compared to 4.55 for international genebanks (on a scale where 5 is the highest), indicating lower adoption among national partners.

Furthermore, while success of the Genesys is recognized in terms of number of accessions logged, numbers of accessions need to be considerably higher to be recognized as a truly global system. Key blockers to achieving this scale are the current reach of the Crop Trust and the refusal of larger national genebanks, such as those in Canada, China, and Japan to share data on Genesys, their positions largely driven by individual country policies. A final issue noted that relates to adoption, was that genebanks have systems in place (either self-developed or part of another network) that serve a similar, often more tailored purpose. For Crop Trust's systems to supersede these systems, they need to be both generic enough to be global and tailored enough to be contextually relevant, increasing the level of complexity in system development.

The maintenance and further development of these platforms are resource-intensive, posing potential sustainability challenges in the future. The agility and global-local requirements of system development, the support required for adoption and the scale required to ensure effectiveness are key design criteria that may require increased resource investment in these

systems to ensure their sustainability. This long-term thinking and analysis of strategy (including responding to the threats and opportunities of AI), operating model and resourcing requirements is at very early stages in the Crop Trust, recommendations of this report highlight the need to expedite this thinking.

Finally, across platforms external partners noted a lack of engagement in the process of designing and developing tools and processes: for Genesys 77% agreed they were engaged *(23% neutral*), for QMS 76% agreed they were engaged *(19% neutral, 5% disagree)* and for GGCE 55% agreed they were engaged *(35% neutral, 10% disagree)*. Strengthening the engagement and involvement of partners in the design, implementation and ongoing improvement of the systems could support sustainability of systems into the future.

Global Crop Conservation Strategies

Within the context of system-wide services, the Crop Trust is also responsible for the development of Global Crop Conservation Strategies. These strategies aim to provide an overview of the state of conservation for crop genetic resources, offering valuable insights into the status of a species. **Since 2007, the Crop Trust has coordinated the development of 41 global crop conservation strategies with the overall aim of identifying priority collections and actions to strengthen the conservation of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture**, and to ensure that conservation activities and priorities are better coordinated among stakeholders (including genebanks and their users) worldwide.

In general, some external partners agreed with the relevance and appropriateness of the Global Crop Conservation Strategies and, overall, they are viewed as a resource that provides an overview of the state of conservation of a crop's genetic resources offering significant value to the community. Some genebanks report that elements of the respective strategies have, to varying degrees, been incorporated into organisational approaches and one partner reported positively on their involvement in the development of the strategy, supporting its usefulness.

However, the **Global Crop Conservation Strategies have largely not been comprehensively adopted by genebanks**. The challenges facing these strategies are highlighted in the opinion paper commissioned by the Crop Trust (Dulloo and Khoury, 2023) and comments from consultation. A primary barrier to adoption is that the Global Crop Conservation Strategies developed by the Crop Trust have not been politically endorsed or integrated into formal processes of the ITPGRFA, leaving no mandate or formal mechanism for adoption and limiting their visibility and utility. Strengthening this integration – as well as working through regional and national mechanisms – could therefore enhance the visibility and utility of these important outputs generated through the activities of the Crop Trust and ensure wider adoption. This impediment to adoption is currently being addressed through the BLE-funded project, Mainstreaming Crop Conservation Strategies in Treaty Processes. Furthermore, limited funding to support the adoption of strategies, as well as limitations in capacity and resources, is viewed by some genebanks as a barrier. Other genebanks indicate shortcomings of the strategies themselves as an obstacle to adoption, highlighting that in certain cases they are not sufficiently up to date or in depth.

National Genebank and Time-Bound Project Work

Over the past 10 years, time-bound project activities have increased within the Crop Trust's activities (See Figure 5). Since its inception, the Crop Trust has a total project income of USD 347million. This figure includes USD 187million from the CGIAR, which largely relates to the Genebank Platform. If this was removed from calculations to give a more accurate picture of income for project funding**, total project funding would be USD 160million**.

The intensification of project work has shifted the primary role of the Crop Trust from one of a manager of the Endowment Fund and a 'quasi-donor' to evolving also as an implementing agency. This approach is now a core element of the three pillars that constitute the Crop Trust strategy through to 2030. An overview of time-bound project activities and their active periods as implemented by the Crop Trust as part of its expanding mandate is provided in Figure 5.

The Crop Trust's work with national genebanks demonstrates positive results, it has provided technical support, training and capacity building for staff, provided support on global genebank standards/QMS - GGCE and Genesys, supported safe storage of collections in Svalbard; and assisted in rescuing the cocoa diversity in Ecuador. Additionally, through the Crop Trust's projects, there have been positive implications for national Genebanks that include their recognition as key facilities in the conservation of crop biodiversity. National genebanks were particularly positive about the effectiveness of Crop Trust's capacity strengthening work, scoring the Crop Trust's "ability to improve the quality of crop genetic resource conservation" 4.73 out of 5, the highest of all external stakeholder types for this question.

Project Name	Start Date	End Date
Crop Wild Relatives	2011	2021
CGIAR Genebank Platform	2017	2021
Breathing New Life into Global Crop Conservation Strategies	2019	2022
Seed for Resilience	2019	2025
Templeton Pre-Breeding Project	2019	2023
Biodiversity for Opportunities, Livelihoods and Development (BOLD) Project	2021	2030
Sweet potato Project	2022	2025
Mainstreaming the Global Crop Conservation Strategies in Plant Treaty Processes	2022	2025
Power of Diversity Funding Facility	2025	

Figure 5 Selected time-bound project activities implemented by the Crop Trust as part of its expanding mandate.

Project examples

The Crop Wild Relative project which received 10 years of funding support contributed to collecting and pre-breeding efforts that have supported the conservation and utilization of crop genetic resources. The Crop Wild Relatives (CWR) project aimed to collect and conserve crop wild relatives to facilitate their use in crop breeding programs for food and agriculture. 47 partner institutions enabled the collection of 4,587 seed samples between 2013-2018, representing 25 gene pools in 25 countries. The 2021 donor report for the CWR attests that "at least two fifths of the taxa originally in the high priority category for conservation are now better represented" due to the project achievements, indicating effectiveness (Crop Trust, 2021). The Crop Wild Relatives project pre-breeding outputs focused on developing advanced materials and generating knowledge to support climate change adaptation. This included advanced pre-breeding material for eggplant, potato, sweet potato, and grass pea that have been introgressed into breeding lines, demonstrating the utility of wild relatives. The pre-breeding activities are just some of the

impacts that the CWR Project generated highlighting the role of genebanks in generating genetic material that has desirable traits to be included in breeding programs (de Boef et al., 2019).

The BOLD Project - Biodiversity for Opportunities, Livelihoods and Development – aims to build the capacity of national genebanks, support the deployment of genetic diversity, and advocate more widely for crop diversity (Crop Trust, 2020). High level evidence points to the effectiveness of the project in achieving these objectives. In 2023, for example, 76 staff from 15 national genebanks received training in genebank operations; 6 crops saw advances in pre-breeding and trait development for use in production systems; 45 students and practitioners benefited from a postgraduate course; advancements were made towards for safety duplications with the Svalbard Seed Vault; and 6 major global events were held (Crop Trust, 2023). The mid-term review of BOLD found strong evidence of effectiveness of the project, especially as the BOLD project was noted as particularly complex and highly political, attesting to the ability of the Crop Trust to overcome these challenges and keep the project largely on track. It also noted that the Crop Trust was well-placed to implement this complex project.

Sustainability of results of project work and exit strategies have been addressed in some of the projects. While there is no clear documentation of Crop Trust's approach to exit strategies with national genebanks, the Seeds for Resilience projects embeds sustainability as part of its project design. In this case, the project is designed to support 5 national genebanks with short term support through implementation of project activities and includes also long-term funding through an investment by the donor in the Endowment Fund to support these genebanks in perpetuity. This project demonstrates an excellent example of how project funding and Endowment Fund contributions can work together for both short and long term benefits for genebanks, ensuring benefits of project work can be sustained into the future.

Reflecting on the effectiveness of project activities overall, 100% of external partners felt that the Crop Trust could demonstrate "positive results in terms of increasing global awareness of the importance of crop diversity" in the survey conducted. One national genebank reported 'the Crop Trust is on the right track with BOLD' and national genebank partners scored the statement, "the support provided by the Crop Trust is highly relevant to my organisation's needs and priorities" on average 4.8 out of 5 by national genebank partners.

Some issues for strengthening the effectiveness of project activities

The review has noted that Crop Trust's projects are well conceptualized (addressing key gaps, evidence informed, build on previous projects and learning etc.), however in terms of implementation areas for strengthening are noted. Projects frequently face underspending due to delayed starts, contracting issues, procurement challenges, and technical implementation challenges that have a direct knock-on effect on financial management. Furthermore, it is reported from Crop Trust staff that there is regular under-costing of projects, often resulting in staff being overstretched and as noted above, at times compromising quality. Seeking no-cost extensions (NCEs) is also reported by the team as frequent, often as a result of internal and external factors, but can often have a negative impact on donor relations- although key to note, the Crop Trust's donor relationships have not been negatively impacted by NCEs.

National partner selection and management may also benefit from strengthened policy and practice. Partner selection is not based on codified criteria, for example based on capacity analysis or compliance with donor funding requirements. Rather this is done as part of the first phase of a project. This approach has resulted in instances where the Crop Trust has selected partners that did not have the required minimum capacity to engage in donor funded projects and therefore slowing project progress. Recognizing that a detailed capacity assessment of all national genebanks would not be feasible from Crop Trust resources, it would be prudent to

develop a process to more robustly target partners before project implementation commences. This may not alleviate the issue, but may help mitigate the risk.

Effective project implementation is further hindered by the Crop Trust's lack of 'on the ground' resources for project support and monitoring and evaluation, a gap which is largely filled by external consultants. The programme team note the lack of on the ground presence as a key constraint and difficult to address due to the Crop Trust's hosting agreement with Germany. A potential solution to strengthening on the ground support for project work is through International genebanks, however International genebanks report the lack of engagement and coordination in project design as a barrier. This was reported by several international genebanks in interviews, while 59% of partners surveyed felt involved in the design and planning of projects *(19% neutral, 22% disagree)*, highlighting some room for improvement.

Finally, it was noted that the skills of the programmes team are highly technical in terms of conservation of genetic resources, but perhaps not as experienced in terms of global development implementation. Depending on the Crop Trust's ambition with regard to project work and any scaling of this work, the Crop Trust may require an updated operating model, including the structure, skills, processes and systems that support implementation.

2.3 Impact

In assessing pathways to impact of investments made by the Crop Trust, the Theory of Change (ToC) of the current Crop Trust Strategic Plan: Food Forever provides insights into what constitutes outcomes that lead to impact, supported by the recently developed MEL framework. The overarching vision of the Strategy is a world where crop diversity is permanently conserved (outcome) and made available to support sustainable, resilient agri-food systems (impact). This clearly articulates the role of the Crop Trust in conserving crop genetic diversity that can be used to support continued crop improvement based on the use of this genetic diversity. Through these efforts the Crop Trust contributes to the global goals of the ITPGRFA and SDGs including zero hunger, climate action, and biodiversity conservation.

Pathways to Impact – Strategic Plan 2030: Food Forever.

The Strategy formulates three pathways to achieve the stated impact:

1. Long-term support for essential genebank operations: Ensuring collections of global significance are efficiently maintained and accessible through sustainable financial assistance (i.e. the Endowment Fund) for essential operations of all genebanks under Article 15 of the ITPGRFA and additional genebanks holding globally significant crop diversity collections.
2. Time-bound support for upgrading, collecting, and use: Enhancing genebank infrastructure, rescuing threatened crop diversity, and improving accessibility for researchers, breeders, and farmers.
3. Increasing global awareness: Raising the profile of crop diversity on the global development agenda and strengthening institutional partnerships.

The outcomes generated through these areas are effectively reflected within the monitoring and evaluation framework with indicators that quantify progress towards the overall goal of permanently securing the conservation and use of crop genetic diversity. There are indicators that indirectly assess demand for this diversity through the standard material transfer agreement (SMTAs) and CGIAR distribution of crop genetic resources. As previously stated, the activities of the Crop Trust and its partners contribute to the global conservation of crop genetic resources, in line with the Trust's mandate. In turn, therefore, the Crop Trust's impact has the potential to support global food security, via crop genetic resource conservation, by enabling the

development of high yielding and nutritionally dense crop varieties that are resistant to disease, pests, climatic change, extreme weather and changing soil conditions, thus facilitating increased food availability, improved health outcomes, and sustainable agricultural practices. Furthermore, the Crop Trust directly engages with farming communities through Germplasm User Groups as beneficiaries.

Partnership

The Crop Trust works with over 120 technical partners, including international genebanks, national genebanks, international collections, international organisations, multilateral organisations and universities to lead global projects that protect crop diversity and develop technology to make this diversity accessible worldwide. Partnerships are formalised through contracts/nonservice agreements, of which the Crop Trust has signed over 577 in this review period. There are 5 key record types within contracts, these are donor agreements, long-term partnership agreements, non-financial agreements, other and project agreements.

Record types	Number signed over the last 10 years
Donor agreements	90
Long-term partnership agreements (LPA/LTG)	19
Non-financial agreement (Genesys, GGCE, MoUs with genebanks etc.)	113
Other (Project package transfer, equipment transfer)	44
Project agreements	311

Figure 6 Number of agreements signed in 10 years to date by agreement type.

While Figure 6 gives an overview of the number and types of partnerships and contract agreements, the assessment below focuses on system level partners, CGIAR centres and International Genebanks, National Genebanks.

Overall, partners expressed strong satisfaction with the support provided by Crop Trust. **100% of survey respondents agreed that Crop Trust adds significant value to the conservation of crop genetic resources through its work and partnerships.** Several partners highlighted the technical support they received for different crops as valuable. **95% of respondents agreed that their organisation has a strong, collaborative relationship with the Crop Trust** *(2.5% neutral, 2.5% disagree)* and qualitative comments reinforced the respondents' strong appreciation for their partnership with the Crop Trust.

Crop Trust's partner landscape (programme impact)

FAO and the ITPGRFA are key strategic system level partners of the Crop Trust, with appointing rights to the Executive Board of the Crop Trust. It appears that there is clarity and shared understanding of the distinct role and value add of the Crop Trust, FAO and the ITPGRFA. International genebanks (10 of which are part of CG centres) are critical partners of the Crop Trust. The Crop Trust is a voting member of the CGIAR System Council and the international genebanks host the collections that underpin the key objective of the Crop Trust as laid out in its Constitution. Finally, the Crop Trust currently works with 15 national genebanks as part of its BOLD project. These genebanks are located in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Additionally, the Crop Trust supports four national genebanks in sub-Saharan Africa through the Seeds for Resilience Project. These include genebanks in Nigeria, Zambia, Kenya, and Ghana.

The Crop Trust is recognized by strategic partners, international genebanks, and national genebanks for its **technical expertise, financial support, and role in strengthening operational standards, with project-based collaborations providing vital lifelines that sustain core activities and align with partner priorities**. Positive outcomes include strong relationships and demonstrable impact on the functioning and survival of genebanks. Common themes arising in terms of improvement include ensuring continued focus on the Endowment Fund amid expanding project work, strengthening resource mobilization capabilities, enhancing clarity on ambitions for national genebank support, and increasing collaboration with international genebanks, especially in relation to project implementation.

Impact achieved

The Importance of Genebanks for Food Security

Crop genetic diversity and its safeguarding within genebanks specifically enables the development of crop varieties that drive improvements in productivity, resilience, and sustainability, thereby contributing to food security and economic growth. Whilst much of the focus of the Crop Trust's work is the conservation of crop genetic resources, the use of this material in breeding programs is 'downstream' of the core mandate of the Crop Trust. It is argued that a key element of assessing the impact of supporting the conservation of crop diversity is in the use of this material for a more sustainable food system, including use by researchers, breeders, NGOs and farmers among others.

Svalbard Global Seed Vault

The Svalbard Global Seed Vault plays a critical role in the conservation of major crops by serving as a global backup storage facility for seed samples from genebanks globally. It ensures the long-term preservation of genetic diversity for food crops, safeguarding against threats such as natural disasters, climate change, and political instability. The Vault complements *ex situ* conservation efforts by providing a secure repository for duplicate seed samples, contributing to the global effort to protect crop diversity. **The Crop Trust contributes to the Svalbard Global Seed Vault operations through financial and logistical support, and links projects (e.g. Seeds for Resilience and BOLD) to the Svalbard Global Seed Vault by supporting project partners with the depositing of accessions in the Vault.** Since its formal opening in 2008 with the initial deposit of 320,000 accessions, the number of accessions safeguarded in the Vault has risen to 1.3 million in 2024 (Crop Trust, 2024a), providing evidence of the effectiveness of the Crop trust's Endowment Fund in its support of international collections and Svalbard (Figure 7). In 2024, accessions included contributions from 20 first-time depositors, including nine genebanks who had not deposited before, showing the growing network and expanding impact of Svalbard. October 2024 saw the largest number of seed samples deposited since 2020.

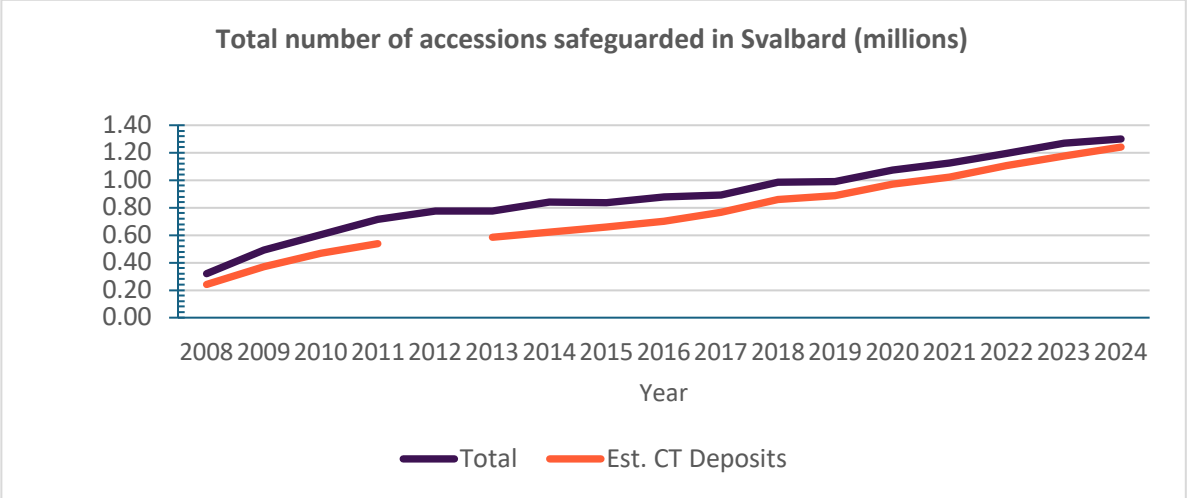

Figure 7 Cumulative growth in the number of accessions safeguarded in Svalbard Global Seed Vault and the total number of accessions deposited from Crop Trust supported activities through international genebanks and projects. Data extracted Annual Reports of Crop Trust

One of the clearest demonstrations of the impact of the Svalbard Global Seed Vault is its critical role in the reconstitution of ICARDA's Syrian genebank collection. Following the conflict in Syria, ICARDA's genebank in Aleppo faced significant challenges, including the inability to access its stored genetic resources. ICARDA had previously deposited duplicates of its seed collections in the Svalbard Global Seed Vault, which serves as a secure backup facility for global seed collections and in 2015, ICARDA requested the withdrawal of seeds from the Svalbard Vault to re-establish its genebank operations in new locations in Lebanon and Morocco. This marked the first-ever withdrawal from the Vault. The seeds were successfully used to regenerate and restore the collections, ensuring the continued availability of critical genetic resources for research, breeding, and conservation. This highlights the relevance and effectiveness of safe duplication in global genebank systems. Furthermore, it provides **concrete evidence of the contribution of Crop Trust and its partners to the ITPGRFA and SDG Indicator 2.5.**

Contributions to the use and long-term conservation of PGRFA

The Crop Trust supports activities that facilitate the use and long-term *ex situ* preservation of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture, in line with the ITPGRFA. The preservation of genetic diversity, including landraces, crop wild relatives, and modern varieties, is essential for breeding resilient crops, which is aligned to SDG Target 2.5, which emphasises the importance of genetic diversity for ending hunger and promoting sustainable agriculture.

Breeders, for example, are using genetic resources held within genebanks to generate new and improved food crops that have traits that impart climate resilience and meet market requirements. Whilst not strictly within the mandate of the Crop Trust, this practical usage would not be possible without the global conservation of crop genetic diversity and therefore speaks to the overall indirect impact of Trust's activities.

The Crop Trust has contributed to impact on the use and long-term conservation of plant genetic resources in several ways. Long-term conservation of crop varieties enables the development of improved crop varieties that increase yields, enhance nutritional quality, and reduce vulnerability to environmental stress. Genetic resources stored in genebanks provide traits for crops to adapt to extreme weather conditions, such as drought or flooding, and there is strong evidence the material in Crop Trust-supported genebanks is used in breeding programmes. Efforts by CIMMYT and ICARDA have used wild wheat relatives, in developing climate-resilient wheat and durum varieties, for example. The role of CWR and landraces incorporated into varietal releases has also

increased over time: approximately 67% of genetic constitution of new and improved varieties is made up of material that is based on CWR and landraces, highlighting their growing significance in varietal development over time.

Furthermore, genebanks facilitate international germplasm exchange, fostering collaboration and reducing reliance on local genetic resources. They act as a safeguard against the loss of genetic diversity due to habitat destruction, urbanization, and monoculture farming, in effect an 'insurance policy'. For example, the CIP genebank contributed to the development of high-yielding and disease-resistant potato varieties that include Victoria and Pallay Poncho. In the case of Victoria 72% of the germplasm used in its development had its origin from the CIP genebank, and it has generated gross economic benefits of USD 1.04 billion in Uganda over 25 years. The adoption of improved varieties like Victoria has led to productivity gains, increased farmer incomes, and reduced production costs. The annual cost of running the CIP genebank (~USD 4 million) is less than a tenth of the economic benefits derived from a single variety in one country (Bernal-Galeano et al. 2020).

There is also a notable economic impact of crop diversity. Improved varietal releases of crops associated with the use of genetic resources stored in genebanks – such as the Victoria potato variety; CIMMYT and ICARDA CAIGE nurseries in Australia, and Jabal durum wheat variety in Morocco – have demonstrated quantifiable economic returns. Studies show high rates of return on investment in genebanks, often exceeding costs many times over. A 2019 CGIAR review found that economic returns are typically very high, between 40-60% compared to investment (Smale, 2019). In particular, this is driven by increased farmer yields and lower consumer prices (Smale, 2019). For example, the use of IRRI's rice accessions in breeding and the release of improved rice varieties generated an estimated USD 325 million (in 1990 dollars) in value between 1965-1990 (Villanueva et al., 2020). While these impacts are somewhat removed from the direct focus of the Crop Trust and genebanks, they speak to the use of genetic resources held within genebanks by breeders to generate new and improved varieties of food crops with climate-resilient and market ready traits.

Another key demonstration of the impact of the Crop Trust support to genebanks is the distribution of germplasm to **tens of thousands of requesters in more than 120 countries worldwide since 2012** undertaken predominantly by international genebanks within the CGIAR. Approximately 80% of these distributions have gone to low- and middle-income countries. In 2023 alone, distributions exceeded 200,000 samples, marking a significant increase compared to earlier years. This **growth in accession distribution reflects the increasing demand for genetic resources**, driven by factors such as technological advances, new research projects, and emerging challenges such as pests, diseases, and climate change. It should be noted that annual trends in requests and distributions are unpredictable, influenced by external factors that include new projects and changing capacities.

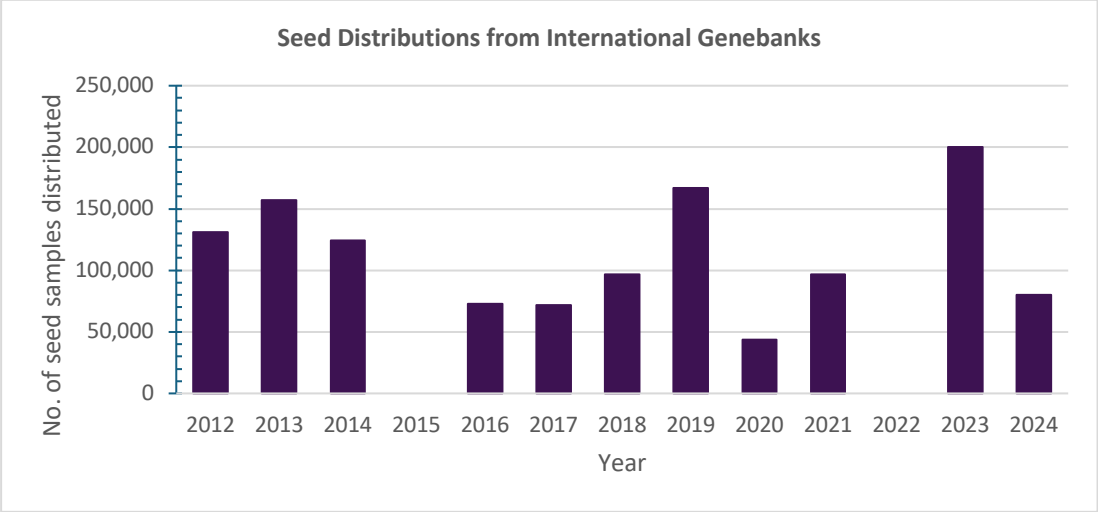

Figure 8 Estimated distribution of seed samples from international genebanks since 2012. The number of samples were extracted from reporting in Crop Trust Annual Reports.

There are numerous examples and case studies that have been undertaken by the Crop Trust and its partners that have highlighted the use of genetic material that is conserved in genebanks that it supports. These include independent studies on the role of CGIAR breeding programs and the genetic material housed in their genebanks that have enhanced food security and the economic viability of farmers globally.

Global Awareness

Goal 3 in the Crop Trust Food Forever strategic plan targets "Increasing Global Awareness of the Importance of Crop Diversity", which includes institutional partnerships, strategic communications, outreach and thought leadership to elevate crop diversity on the global agenda. The Crop Trust measures and communicates its contribution to food security and biodiversity conservation primarily through its partnerships, projects, and the conservation of genetic resources. Whilst there is some concern from some stakeholders that the Crop Trust has struggled to connect its work to broader narratives like climate change and nutrition security, there is clear evidence that projects and activities undertaken by the Crop Trust and its partners address these elements, for example of the role that CWR and landraces play in breeding programs linking crop diversity with new varietal releases (see Section 2.2). Furthermore, there are projects within the Crop Trust, such as PDFF that have a strong nutrition communication element. Without a detailed assessment of all communications materials and communications results, it is difficult to make a definitive judgement, but given the feedback and the prominence of these issues, a reflection on messaging and its focus may be helpful.

Several indications of impact in this area were identified in consultations. In the survey with external partners, stakeholders felt positively that the Crop Trust **"can demonstrate positive results in terms of increasing global awareness of the importance of crop diversity", with 100% of respondents in agreement.** Furthermore, external partners commented that support from Crop Trust had helped raise the global profile of their own work, thus building global awareness of crop conservation issues. In particular, **the Svalbard Global Seed Vault has been a critical tool** in this regard. Stakeholders noted that the Crop Trust has successfully leveraged the engagements with, and impact of, the Svalbard Vault to raise global awareness and increase public and institutional understanding of critical issues and methods in crop conservation, describing it as a "big selling point" that is well utilised.

Section 3: Efficiency and Effectiveness

3.1 Finance

Crop Trust follows the **Financial Administration requirements as approved by the Executive Board in the Finance Policy**. The Financial Administration procedures incorporate the risk management process; strong and effective controls; financial accuracy; process timelines; transparent accountability and integrity. The Executive Board of the Crop Trust is ultimately responsible for its financial management.

Good progress has been made in the Crop Trust's financial practices over the last ten years. The Executive Board and staff have good confidence that the *'financial management of the organisation supports long-term sustainability'* with 86% *(14% neutral)* and 62% *(21% neutral, 17% disagree)* agreeing with the statement respectively. Policies, procedures and manuals have been developed and financial audits are normal practice. There is an established budgeting practice within the Crop Trust, which would benefit from being formally documented.

Income

The annual income of the Crop Trust has grown from USD 28 million in 2015 to USD 51 million in 2024. Organisational income comprises of all income received, including contributions to the Endowment Fund. Since its inception, the Crop Trust has enjoyed the support of over sixty donors, Germany and Norway are Crop Trust's biggest governmental donors, contributing a total of 17% each (combined 34%) to total contributions of the Crop Trust. Organisational income from 2015-2024 is depicted below:

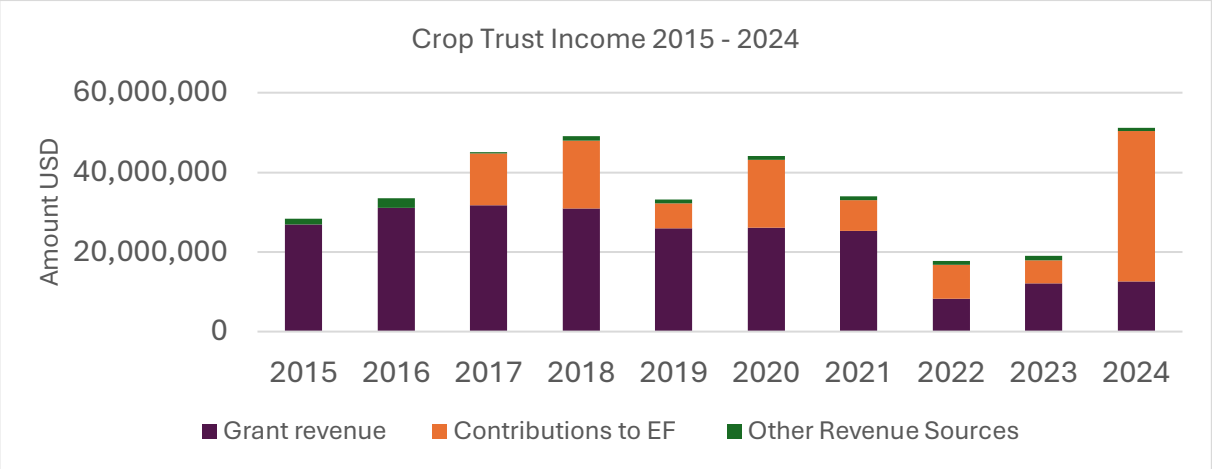

Figure 9: Other revenue sources, as reflected in the Crop Trust's financial statements, include unrestricted contributions, interest income, and contributions to loan interest.

Expenditure

The graph below illustrates expenditure over the ten year period in relation to genebank grants. The graph demonstrates significant growth in financial support to genebanks over the ten year period, particularly via LPAs as genebanks reach the required standards.

Expenditure on LPAs and LTGs and other Supplementary Grants

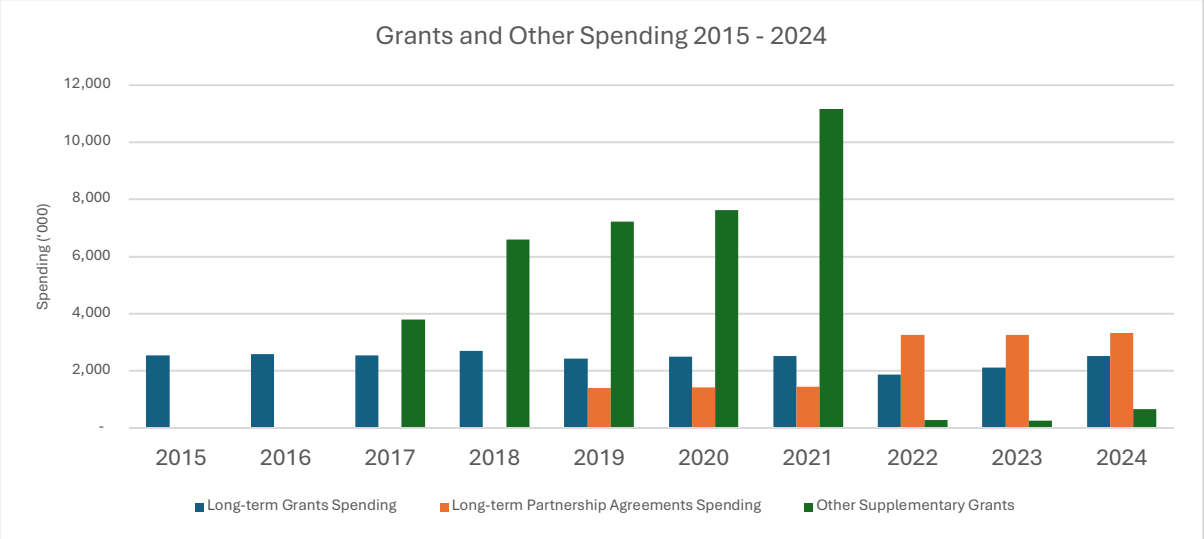

Figure 10: Other supplementary grants refers to additional short-term grants to support genebanks.

3.2 Endowment Fund and Project Funding

Endowment Fund

The Crop Trust Endowment Fund represents the financial foundation of the Crop Trust's mission to secure the world's crop diversity for future generations, as noted under Article 3 of the Constitution 'The Trust will establish an endowment fund to provide grants to support the maintenance of eligible collections of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture that meet agreed standards of management and availability of the genetic resources, related information, knowledge and technologies, and to cover operating expenses and other expenses incidental thereto' and further describes as 'as an essential element of its *(the International Treaty)* Funding Strategy'.

The Endowment Fund is an investment portfolio fully integrated into the Crop Trust's legal and financial framework. Its assets appear on the Crop Trust's balance sheet, its contracts are executed under the organization's name, and its performance is consolidated in the Crop Trust's audited financial statements. The Fund is governed by policies on asset allocation, withdrawal, and sustainability commitments, which are established by the Executive Board and monitored by a multi-tiered oversight system.

The **ultimate financing target of the Endowment Fund would ensure that the Crop Trust is able to fund all the long-term tasks encompassed by its mandate from the annual income of the Endowment fund (2030 Strategy).** The 2030 target of the Endowment Fund is USD 625million, which would yield USD25million annually to meet the long-term funding needs under Key Result Area 1. The level of the Endowment Fund has seen a steady increase from USD157million in 2015 to USD357 in 2024, representing growth owing to contributions and investment return.

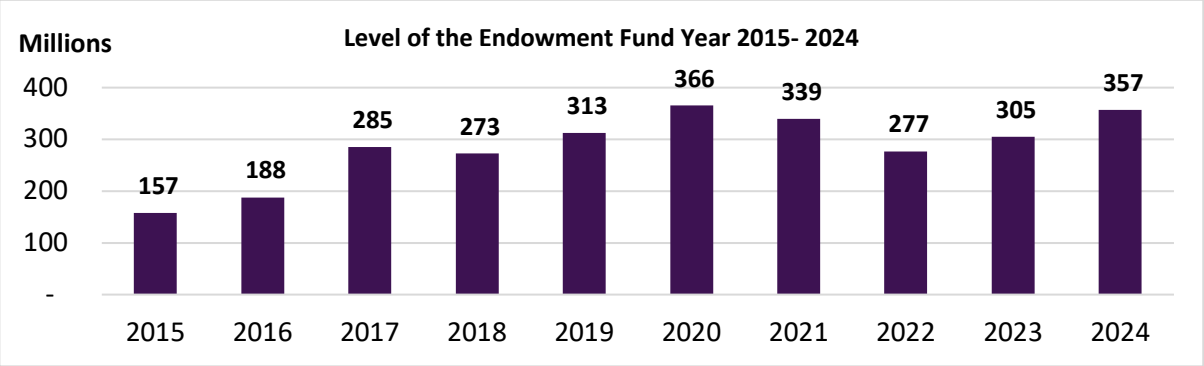

Figure 11: Endowment Fund level (USD millions), 2015-2024

Endowment Fund Contributions and Withdrawals

The graph below shows the Endowment Fund Withdrawals and Contributions over the review period.

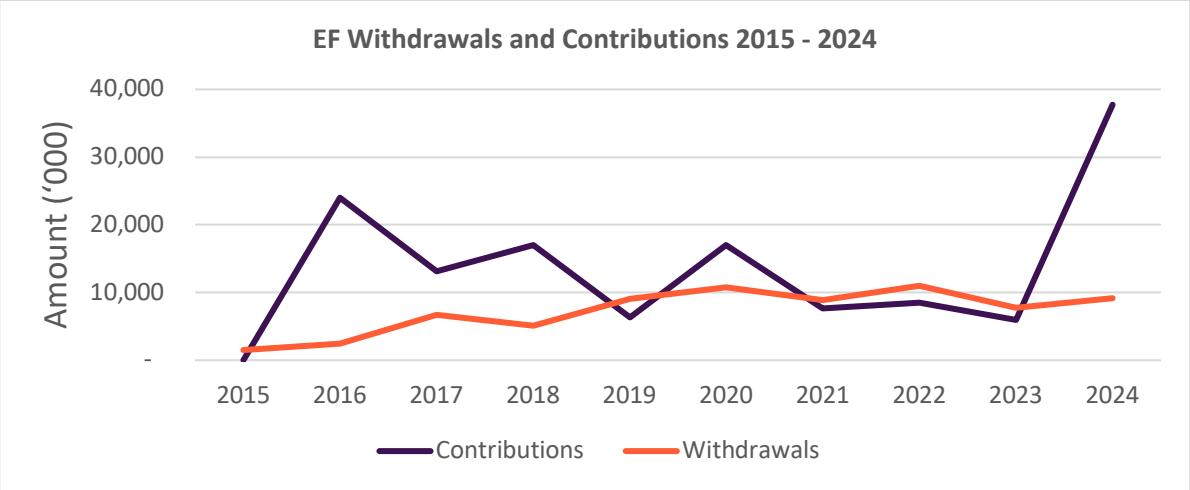

Figure 12: Endowment Fund Contributions and Withdrawals, 2015-2024

In 2024, the Endowment Fund grew from USD301 to USD 357 million, which includes contributions and investment returns net of income withdrawals. The growth in 2024 of the Endowment Fund allowed the Crop Trust to expand its long-term genebank support. For example, following an external review of the genebank, Africa Rice, a CGIAR partner, became eligible for a Long-term Partnership Agreement (LPA signed 2025).

Between 2015 and 2024, the Fund received USD 137 million in new inflows, the most successful year in 2024 with USD37.7 in contributions and the least successful year in 2019, with USD6.3million in contributions. New donor contributions have been an essential driver of the growth of the fund.

The Endowment Fund has enjoyed support from 28 donors, including governments, private sector, foundations and individuals, however it should be noted **that 95.4% of Endowment Fund contributions are from governments**. The Endowment Funding Status at 31st December 2024 recorded contributions of USD 297 million. The **top 10** donors of the Endowment Fund, illustrated below, account **for 97% of the overall contributions** to the Endowment Fund.

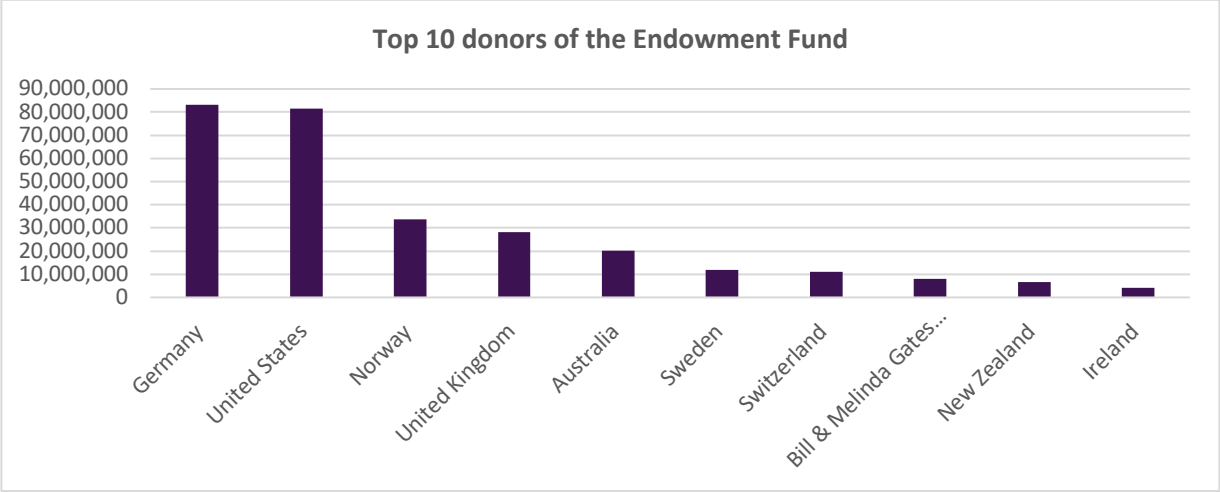

Figure 13: Top 10 Donors of the Endowment Fund. Amount in USD: Crop Trust Funding Status

The trajectory of the Endowment Fund has highlighted a key challenge, this relates to the gap between the Fund's current size and its long-term target. At USD 357 million in 2024 during the review period (and most recently 395.5 million as of September 30 2025), the Fund remains well short of the revised USD 625 million goal for 2030. Mobilizing this scale of donor financing in a competitive global funding environment will be difficult, particularly as reliance remains concentrated in a handful of government donors. Diversification into philanthropic and private capital exists but remains marginal.

Endowment Fund Performance

Over the period 2015 to 2024, the Endowment Fund demonstrated significant overall growth despite market volatility. The growth of the Fund has placed it broadly in line with its policy objective of achieving real returns of 4% above U.S. CPI over a rolling ten-year horizon.

The Crop Trust benchmarks the Endowment Fund performance against 3 benchmarks: US CPI + 4%, a 70/30 composite benchmark (MSCI ACWI / Bloomberg Global Treasury Index) and the Alpha Nasdaq OCIO $250-500m AUM Endowments and Foundations Index. The Endowment Fund had an average annual performance return of 4.38% from 2016 to 2024 and from 2019-2024 (benchmark data is available in Crop Trust financial statements for these years) the Endowment Fund had an average annual performance of 5.12% in comparison to the Investment Policy benchmark (US CPI + 4%) performance of 1.07%.

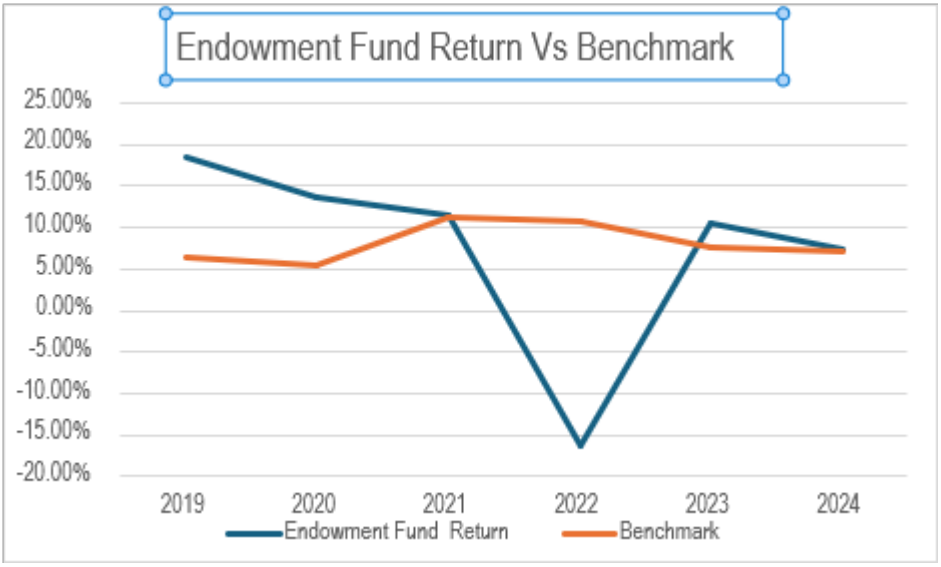

Figure 14: Performance against benchmark (Investment Policy benchmark US CPI +4%)as reported in Crop Trust Financial Statements

Endowment Fund Withdrawals and Expenditure

It is important to note that the support provided by the endowment fund comes solely from investment income earned i.e., the actual contributions invested in the endowment fund are not drawn on. **The Crop Trust has consistently stayed within its policy of a maximum drawdown of 4% to protect the Endowment Fund**.

As Figure 14 illustrates the lowest levels of withdrawals were in 2015, circa. USD 1.5 million and highest in 2022, circa USD 11 million. All withdrawals remain within the 4% cap policy and are approved on an annual basis by the Executive Board. Withdrawals from the Fund are used both to support genebanks and to cover a portion of the organization's operating costs, with strict limits in the withdrawal policy that caps drawdowns at 4% of the twelve-quarter trailing average value of the portfolio. Actual withdrawals have typically ranged between 2.5% and 4% over the past decade, reflecting a prudent approach that has helped preserve and grow the Endowment Fund in its early stages.

Between 2015 and 2024, the share of genebank grants financed by the Endowment Fund increased as a proportion of total grant funding. **In 2015, the Crop Trust records that 90% of genebank grants were financed through project funding/10% Endowment Fund; in 2024 46% of grants were financed through project funding and 54% from the Endowment Fund**. Recognizing that the Crop Trust was still growing the Fund and had project support to enable the Crop Trust to protect and grow the Fund. Over the past ten years, in line with the purpose of the Fund, the grants to genebanks are more proportionally financed by both the Endowment Fund and project funding, this trend demonstrates progress towards the ultimate financing goal of the Crop Trust to fund its core activities from the Endowment Fund.

Other areas to note in relation to the use of the Endowment Fund drawdown has been the financing of system wide services largely from the Endowment Fund, as noted above a decision that has been well received and in line with fulfilling the Crop Trust's mandate and well aligned to its mission and capabilities, and secondly, the use of the Endowment Fund drawdown to support staff and operational costs. **In 2024, 67% of the Endowment Fund withdrawal was spent on genebank grants, 13% on system wide services and 20% on internal operations**. Clearly the

Crop Trust's human resources are essential for the organization and a purpose of the Endowment Fund is to also support the existence and effectiveness of the Crop Trust as an organization. 69% of staff agreed with the statement 'The Crop Trust allocates resources from the Endowment Fund effectively to achieve its mission', (*17% neutral, 14% disagree*). The review notes however, that to ensure clear and transparent management and allocation of Endowment Fund income withdrawals, it may be beneficial to establish a clear policy in relation to the allocation of income across different areas of work, noting however that the portion required for internal operations may vary depending on the level of other support available.

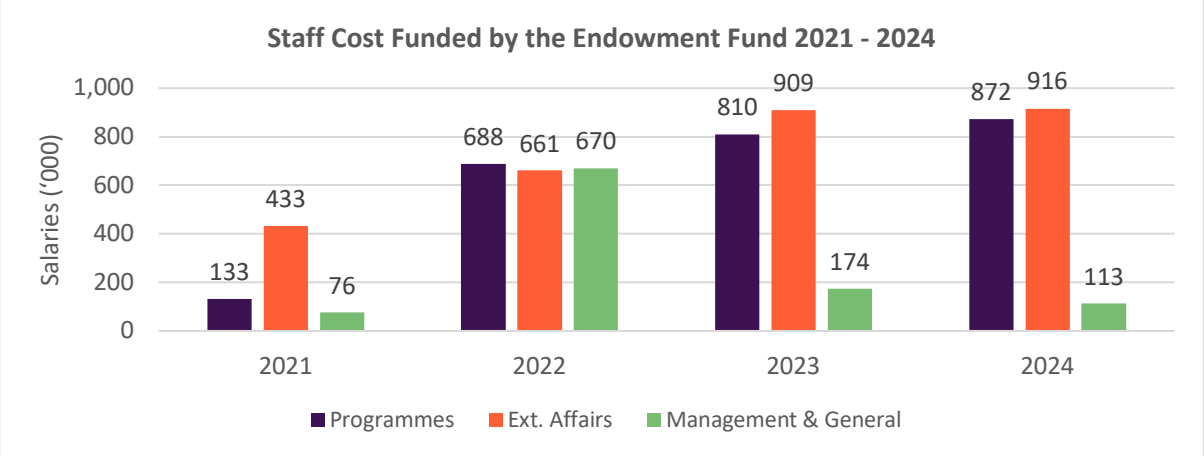

Figure 15: Staff Costs Funded by the Endowment Fund. Salary amounts in USD

The graph above illustrates the amount of money used from Endowment Fund withdrawals for financing of staff costs. This is further detailed in the table below as a proportion of total staff costs by department funded by the Endowment Fund over the ten year period:

% of total staff costs by department funded by the Endowment Fund	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Programmes salaries (directly from EF)	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	10%	39%	45%	46%
Ext. Affairs salaries (directly from EF)	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	50%	70%	72%	59%
Management & General	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	4%	36%	9%	5%

Figure 16: % Staff Costs by department Funded by the Endowment Fund.

Fees

There is not a uniform standard for how fees are set and OCIO fees vary from provider to provider and model to model. According to Cerulli Associates' 2024 OCIO Providers Survey, among the largest 30 OCIO respondents, OCIO advisory fees are typically between 0.21% and 0.30% per year for nonprofits with $51 million to $100 million of assets under management (AUM).[9] By comparison, Mercer's AUM-based fee for the Crop Trust is 0.13%.

Between 2022 and 2024, Crop Trust paid an average of USD 1.53 million annually in fees (including sub-investment manager fees) representing approximately 0.56% and 0.67% of U.S. dollar endowment assets under management. Note that fees will change according to AUM and other

[9] https://institutional.fidelity.com/institutions/insights/topics/investing-ideas/unlocking-ocio-value-for-endowments-and-foundations

contract service variables. To ensure the Crop Trust is getting best value for money from Mercer, it should consider periodically and comprehensively evaluate return on investment of Mercer and assess fees and service against other OCIO providers.

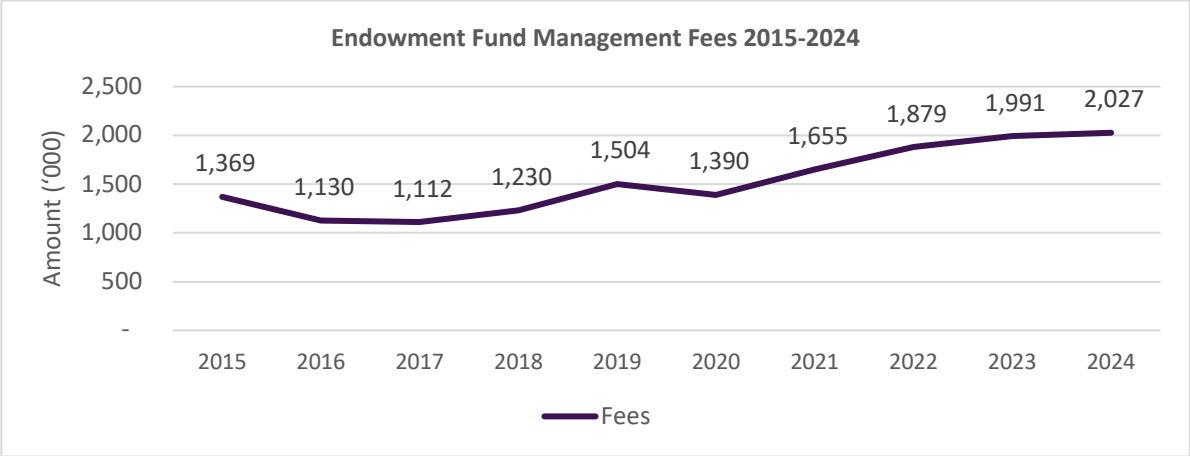

Figure 17: Endowment Fund Fees 2015-2024

Endowment Fund Governance and Management of the Endowment Fund

Governance of the Endowment Fund is through a structured oversight architecture, led by the Executive Board, the Investment Committee, and the Finance, Risk, and Audit Committee, complemented by a Donors' Council. Investment policies have been periodically reviewed and updated during the review period, with the most recent revision completed in November 2024. This framework has provided formal checks and balances, ensuring compliance with withdrawal rules, risk management standards, and ESG commitments.

The Investment Committee is a key governance body of the Crop Trust, providing oversight and strategic guidance to the Executive Board on matters related to the Endowment Fund. It comprises a minimum of five members (currently six, including three external experts), who formally serve *pro bono.* It is recognized that the committee spend considerable time, outside of quarterly meetings, delivering the work for the Crop Trust. The Terms of Reference for the Investment Committee defines the responsibility and function of the IC, that is: to assist the Executive Board in ensuring that the management of the Crop Trust investments is fully compliant, with key areas of responsibility in terms of recommending an investment strategy, reviewing and reporting market performance of the Fund against objectives, reviewing performance of the OCIO (Mercer) at least on an annual basis, and oversee the Crop Trust's financial and investment risks and recommend the appropriate controls to the Finance, Risk, and Audit Committee.[10]

There is strong evidence of the commitment of the Investment Committee and a skill-set on the Committee that enable it to fulfil its responsibilities. The review notes that there is strong evidence of the Investment Committee's contribution to the development of the Investment Policy (2024), including embedding ambitious ESG commitments, as well as reviewing and reporting the market performance of the Endowment Fund against its objectives and identification of risks. Furthermore, the Investment Committee carries out numerous class deep dives each year such as the deep dive into the Equities Portfolio (2024).

An area however for strengthening is in terms of the responsibility around 'reviewing performance of the OCIO at least on an annual basis'. This responsibility is currently carried out

[10] Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board of the Crop Trust (2024), p.14

by the Investment Committee as part of their Quarter 1 review meeting. The process at a high level includes the submission of the annual report by Mercer, a meeting/discussion with the Investment Committee, followed by an Investment Committee only discussion of the performance of Mercer (looking at areas beyond the detail of the report such as value for money, partnership etc.). **No major concerns have been highlighted with this process, but it may offer an opportunity to strengthen in terms of rigour**, for example the Crop Trust could develop an assessment framework for the oCIO (including criteria such as communication, reporting, value add, partnership and communication, timeliness of information, alignment with Crop Trust values etc.) to provide a structured approach and guidance for the annual review. Furthermore the review process, may benefit from its own report (currently embedded in minutes of IC meetings) to support streamlining of documentation and strengthening accountability and learning. It may also be helpful to ensure that corrective or improvement actions are decided and documented as part of the review to ensure the oCIO is continuously strengthening according to Crop Trust needs and externalities.

Since January 2022, management of the Endowment Fund has been delegated to Mercer, a global investment firm appointed as Outsourced Chief Investment Officer (OCIO), responsible for implementing the Fund's investment strategy under the oversight of the Investment Committee. Mercer assumed responsibility for both portfolio management and the integration of environmental, social, and governance (ESG) priorities. This was a strategic decision and replaced the previous dual-manager system (Mercer and DWS), which had created complexity and diluted accountability. Mercer's appointment marked a strategic shift towards unified management, professionalization, and closer alignment with the Crop Trust's sustainability mission, including the ambitious commitment to achieve net-zero portfolio emissions by 2040.

The benefits of the Crop Trust's decision to enter an OCIO model are evident. The decision to enter an OCIO model is noted by CommonFund as a trend within the not-for-profit sector, as nonprofit institutions often do not have the resources in house and an OCIO relationship provides the diverse capacities and resources for Fund management, from rigorous asset allocation modelling to continuous risk assessment analysis. In 2022, 46% of higher education institutions in the US outsourced, up from 41% in 2021[1]. For the Crop Trust, the OCIO model with Mercer has provided the Crop Trust with expertise and knowledge that contributes to the Investment policy development and any ongoing requirements for rebalancing, portfolio management of the Fund, risk monitoring and measurement and reporting.

Finally, a risk commonly cited for the OCIO model is dependency and ceding of control. There was no evidence of this risk being realised in the Crop Trust, however the Crop Trust could perhaps strengthen the mitigations for this potential risk, such as strengthening the annual OCIO assessment, benchmarking return on investment of the OCIO, and further strengthening the governance and management frameworks for OCIO management (roles and responsibilities, decision-making, information flows etc.) The review finds that the OCIO model is an appropriate model for the current size and complexity of the Endowment Fund and in line with resourcing available in the Crop Trust.

In relation to some areas of good practice for an OCIO Model, the review finds:

Area of good practice	Review comments
Clearly define investment objectives: The organization should have a clear understanding of its investment goals and risk tolerance, and communicate these to the OCIO provider	Investment policy in place and periodically reviewed. IC responsibility, Mercer contribution and Executive Board approval.

Establish a strong partnership: Building a robust partnership with the OCIO provider is essential for effective communication, collaboration, and alignment of investment strategies	Contract in place (2022) with regular review and updates, contract includes details on services provided.
Regularly review and evaluate performance: The organization should regularly review the OCIO provider's performance and evaluate the portfolio's performance against the defined investment objectives.	The framework for assessing OCIO performance could be further formalised and documented. Portfolio performance reviewed on a quarterly basis and ad-hoc as necessary. Clear investment objectives in place. Manager selection is fully outsourced to the oCIO, in line with the design and intent of the oCIO model.
Ensure transparency and accountability: Transparency and accountability should be maintained through regular reporting, clear communication channels, and defined roles and responsibilities.	Reporting in line with GIPS standards. Mercer quarterly reporting and dashboards comprehensive to facilitate discussion and informed decision-making. External reporting comprehensive and transparent, through detailed annual financial statements. (There may be an opportunity to make Endowment Fund annual reports more accessible/user friendly as a tool to further strengthen transparency and attract new donors)
Stay informed and engaged: The organization should remain informed about the investment process, market trends, and emerging risks. Active engagement with the OCIO provider and Investment Committee is crucial for making informed decisions.	Quarterly reporting and discussions between Investment Committee and Mercer support this. Mercer resources and broader portfolio allows for good analysis of trends and risks.

ESG

A major achievement between 2015 and 2024, was the development and adoption of a comprehensive ESG framework. The Crop Trust is committed to achieving net-zero portfolio emissions by 2040, **with interim targets of 30% reduction by 2025 and 55% by 2030**. This ambition significantly exceeds the European Union's 2050 roadmap and aligns closely with the Crop Trust's core mission. The Crop Trust's investments are managed in line with Mercer's ESG standards. The Trust is a signatory to the UN Principles for Responsible Investment and the Task Forces on Climate- and Nature-related Financial Disclosures, positioning it within a global community of climate-aligned institutional investors. Since Mercer's appointment as OCIO, ESG integration has deepened, with sustainability principles embedded directly into investment strategy.

Achieving the ambitious ESG target may present a challenge. The net-zero by 2040 commitment is ahead of global norms, but measurement gaps remain at a system level. Current monitoring covers only scope 1 and 2 emissions for listed assets, representing around 68% of the portfolio. Scope 3 emissions and private market exposures are not yet captured. Progress will depend heavily on the emergence of new carbon accounting tools and financial innovations post-2030 (outside of Crop Trust's control),. It should be noted that in 2023, the Investment Committee carried out an assessment which looked at the opportunity cost of the Endowment's Net Zero target and concluded that the sustainable investment objectives of the Endowment have not had a material impact on its returns, volatility or opportunity set. Furthermore, the assessment concluded that the Endowment has the appropriate balance of risk/return and sustainable investment outcomes.

3.3 Fundraising

The global development landscape has suffered **severe disruption in 2025** with the dismantling of USAID and commitments across ODA donors to further reduce foreign assistance and aid budgets**, accelerating the trend of a retreat from multilateralism and heightening geopolitical uncertainty.**

In **2025**, the landscape has been defined by a rapid contraction of traditional public finance, following the U.S. government's decision to dismantle USAID and freeze major tranches of foreign assistance—creating an immediate, multi-billion-dollar shock to bilateral and multilateral programming. With other major DAC donors tightening their budgets, observers report sharp declines in official development assistance (ODA). The OECD projects a **9–17% contraction in ODA in 2025**, following a 9% drop in 2024[11]. These reductions are expected to hit the poorest countries and the most essential services hardest, and the outlook beyond 2025 remains highly uncertain. The **practical fallout for international NGOs (INGOs)** has been severe, including cancelled awards, unpaid obligations, staff reductions, and an accelerated shift toward localization.

Debates over how to fill the financing gap have converged on four main pathways: (1) scaling up multilateral development banks (MDBs) and development finance institutions (DFIs) with concessional windows; (2) expanding blended-finance mechanisms to crowd in private capital; (3) mobilizing larger philanthropic and corporate funding pools; and (4) strengthening regional, South–South, and remittance-based financing.

It is within this context that **the Crop Trust has developed a 2025 Fundraising Strategy**. Despite global headwinds, the Funding Goal remains ambitious; **USD 625 million by 2030** and **USD 850 million in the longer term**, to secure in-perpetuity financing for genebanks and broader crop-diversity initiatives. Survey data reveal mixed perceptions of the achievability of these goals: while **71% of the Executive Board** view the USD 850 million target as achievable (29% neutral), only **52% of staff** share this confidence. Staff expressed concern that unrealistic targets could prove demotivating and foster perceptions of inevitable underperformance.

The development of the 2025 Fundraising Strategy is a key milestone in maturation of Fundraising capabilities for the Crop Trust and demonstrates good analysis and strategic decision making. The Crop Trust may benefit however, from a more detailed breakdown of the Funding Goal, into specific targets (annual/by Strategic Goal/by donor type) which would support the Crop Trust's ability to comprehensively track performance and align ambition with targets. The Strategy identifies key strategic donors and approaches to sustain their engagement, alongside potential new bilateral donors and diversification toward foundations, corporates, and individuals—approaches that mirror wider sectoral practice.

Given that the Endowment Fund is the key financing mechanism for the Crop Trust is it not clear in the Strategy how the Crop Trust will leverage potential networks in this space for fundraising. **Innovative financing mechanisms are continuously under review** (for example, the Crop Trust is a member of the newly launched Innovative Finance Initiative and in touch with the impact investment focal point at Mercer). Many mechanisms however rely on creating a structure with some capacity for revenue generation in order to be able to attract investment capital which as a grant-making body is not suitable for the Crop Trust, and require third-party donor guarantees and/or grants to offset payments and create a viable creditworthy structure. The net grant income in such cases is negligible and uncertain considering the transaction costs and time, as well as the scale of third-party donor support needed. Fee-for-service models have

[11] https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/2025/06/cuts-in-official-development-assistance_e161f0c5/full-report.html

been looked at by an external team and require significant and complex considerations on what could be offered on a fee-generating basis given the global common good nature of crop diversity as well as considerations on target customers with a reliable and significant capacity to pay.

Moreover, as the ambition under each Strategic Goal—particularly Goals 2 and 3—is not well defined, estimating operating needs and corresponding funding requirements remains difficult. Given today's uncertainty, agile management and market testing are essential. The **Crop Trust would benefit from stronger data and cost-structure analysis to inform its funding model**. It is also unclear to what extent current diversification efforts will generate sufficient **core, unrestricted funding** to build long-term organizational resilience.

In terms of **fundraising capability**, the Crop Trust demonstrates clear strengths, notably in its strong donor relationships and reputation for professionalism, responsiveness, and financial accountability. Long-standing partners such as **Norway and Germany** continue to provide consistent support, and the **Donors' Council** remains a valuable engagement platform, though participation levels have been modest. Efforts to co-locate Donors' Council meetings with other key events, such as the CGIAR System Council, appear to have improved engagement.

Historically, the Crop Trust, though an "essential element of the Funding Strategy of the International Treaty" **lacked a robust overarching fundraising strategy** for much of 2015–2024. While fundraising activities and action plans were implemented, there was no unified framework articulating funding goals, targets, and assumptions. Staff feedback during this review highlighted a **lack of strategic coherence** and frequent shifts in priorities, contributing to reduced focus and execution challenges. Alignment on funding priorities also remains mixed: only **42% of staff** agree that there is an appropriate balance between endowment and project fundraising, a sentiment echoed by external stakeholders.

The organization has, however, **significantly invested in its fundraising function**, with the External Affairs team expanding from 5 to 14 members between 2015 and 2024 and resources now allocated more strategically, including dedicated roles for trusts and foundations. Tools such as donor mapping and pipeline analysis are under development to strengthen business-development efficiency. Despite these investments, perceptions of internal capacity remain cautious: only **43% of the Board** and **29% of staff** believe the organization currently has the right capabilities and skills for effective resource mobilization.

An additional area identified as an opportunity for organizational learning and strengthened practice relates to the **strategic investment in the fundraising campaign**, financed from reserves (USD 3 million over three years, approved by the Board in 2022 and extended to 2025). While the campaign represents a significant and forward-looking commitment to expanding the Crop Trust's fundraising reach, the absence of a detailed, costed plan of activities at the proposal stage has made it challenging to systematically report on progress and financial performance. Staff expressed interest in having clearer and more consistent information about the campaign's activities, expected outcomes, and return on investment, reflecting strong engagement and a shared desire to enhance transparency and impact**. Going forward, future strategic investments would benefit from the inclusion of comprehensive plans and budgets** to support more effective monitoring, reporting, and adaptive management, ensuring the full value of such initiatives is captured and communicated.

Finally, **partner engagement in resource mobilization** remains limited, despite being a stated strategic objective in the Financing Strategy. Only **32% of staff** and **29% of Board members** agree that the Crop Trust engages effectively in joint fundraising. International genebanks similarly expressed interest in greater collaboration. Whilst both complexity and competition are recognized as potential barriers to this objective, some progress has been made through **joint**

initiatives with WorldVeg and coordination with **CIMMYT** on the security and defence agenda, reflecting promising foundations for future partnership models.

3.4 Communications

Communications at the Crop Trust have improved notably over the review period, with a stronger strategic focus and greater emphasis on visibility. Efforts to leverage high-profile events and sharpen messaging have contributed to raising awareness of the organisation's mission, contributing to Goal 3 of the current strategy 'Global Awareness of the importance of crop diversity is increased'.

The Crop Trust's digital presence has grown significantly over the review period. Facebook followers increased from 4,000 in 2015 to 94,000 in 2024, generating over 17 million impressions and nearly 600,000 link clicks in 2024. On LinkedIn, the Crop Trust generated nearly 1 million impressions and 47,000 clicks in 2024, alongside 5,903 new followers, an indication of strong interest from a professional audience. **Across all social media channels, the organisation reached a combined total of over 32.8 million impressions in 2024, equivalent to approximately 2.7 million per month.** Newer channels such as Instagram have been introduced, and the increased use of dynamic content like video reflects a shift toward a more modern and responsive communications practice.

The Crop Trust leverages its key assets to increase donor engagement. **Strategic use of platforms such as Svalbard has helped raise the Crop Trust's profile and this has been noted internally and externally as a key strength.** Furthermore, interviewees and survey respondents were generally positive about the Crop Trust's communications work, praising its storytelling and the professionalism of its messaging. While progress is clear, communicating a long-term, complex agenda remains inherently challenging. The mission, though essential, does not lend itself easily to broad public appeal, making it harder to generate emotional engagement or immediate recognition. Communications content focuses more on results of the projects that relate to impact at a farmer level and food security, rather than on genebanks and the conservation of genetic resources, this is often driven by donor preferences. This disconnect between the Crop Trust communications and its mission may be doing the Crop Trust and its mission a disservice.

Events are a key tool to support the achievement of Goal 3 and an area in which the organisation has invested. **Results are difficult to assess in the absence of clear KPIs for events and systematic measurement of results**. While certain events have been deemed successful (Global Crop Diversity Summit-2023/Food Forever), others have not. Concerns raised, primarily by internal stakeholders with regard to events in the Crop Trust, are their cost, the return on investment, and challenges in terms of planning and executing. These challenges have been noted and there is a shift in approach underway. For example, the Trust is exploring a corporate sponsorship model, and successfully partnered with the Swiss government recently for their participation at Davos this year, an event at the German embassy in Paris and the International Seed Federation conference (2025) to reduce event associated costs. The Crop Trust also actively explores opportunities to host activities and networking opportunities at its office, such as the SB62 UNFCCC meeting has also leveraged the opportunity of the UNFCCC meeting in Bonn to highlight Crop Trust's mission.

3.5 People and Culture

Organisational Structure

The Crop Trust's current organisational structure comprises a senior leadership team (ExCo) and three core departments: External Affairs, Programmes, and Administration. As per the February 2025 organogram, each department comprises 15 staff, an equal weighting across units. It should

be noted that there are also additional staff sitting outside the three core departments, namely two in compliance and a chief scientist.

While staff in each function are noted as highly skilled, this **structural symmetry may be misaligned with functional demands**, particularly in Programmes, where feedback highlighted concerns around high workload, capacity stretch, and limited support for delivery. Survey results reinforce this view, with many staff noting capacity constraints in their written comments. Additionally, project implementation often relies on local consultants, as staff are primarily required to be based in Bonn meaning the Programmes team has limited on-the-ground presence in project locations. While consultants offer expertise and fill gaps, a reliance may hinder knowledge transfer and internal learning, potentially leading to higher costs, missed opportunities, and a lack of sustainable solutions.

Over the past decade, the Crop Trust's structure has expanded significantly. The expansion of structure also aligns with a growing organization, growing in both size, almost doubling, and in scope, increased support to genebanks, including system wide services. Some of this growth reflects the rebuilding of staff capacity following the move to full independence and the relocation of the headquarters from Rome to Bonn in 2013, when the organisation had to become more self-reliant outside the host organization support previously provided in Rome. External Affairs has seen the greatest level of growth, growing from 5 staff in 2015 to 14 in 2024. The decisions to increase resources in certain areas of the organization have been aligned with strategy and are investments to support the success of the organization. There were some concerns shared by staff with regard to level of financing of the External Affairs team from the Endowment Fund, to which it is recommended clearer definition and communications of ratios with regard the use of the Endowment Fund withdrawal and return on investment criteria (e.g. income KPIs) will help assuage these concerns and perceptions.

People and Skills

The **people of the Crop Trust are widely regarded as one of the organisation's greatest strengths**. Across all data sources, including staff and partner surveys, and genebank interviews, there was consistent praise for the **professionalism, commitment, and technical expertise of the team**. The partner survey highlighted particularly positive views of the Programme team, with 97% of respondents agreeing that "the support provided by the Crop Trust is highly relevant to my organisation's current needs and priorities," *(3% disagree)* and 87% agreeing that "the Crop Trust fosters a culture of mutual respect and trust in our partnership *(10% neutral, 3% disagree)*" Genebank managers interviewed during the review uniformly spoke highly of the Crop Trust staff they had interacted with. Internally, staff expressed similar appreciation for their peers. The staff survey and focus group discussions referenced high levels of professionalism, mutual respect, and strong team dynamics.

The organisation has a **strong diverse and multicultural workplace**, with 25 nationalities represented among staff in 2024. Gender diversity is also positive, with female representation increasing from 15 women in 2016 (56% of staff) to 30 women in 2023 (64% of staff), and maintaining a strong presence in 2024 with 28 women out of 47 staff (60%). These trends signal strong commitment to the organisation's Gender, Diversity, and Inclusion (GDI) agenda. The average staff tenure of 4.5 years (as of 2024) is generally healthy and indicates relative headcount stability. Turnover rate has decreased from 21.4% in 2016 to 6.74% in 2023. Turnover rates can be impacted by Crop Trust's 3-year contract policy with specific staff hired for a particular function for a limited time.

Staff development is supported through regular retreats and training opportunities (e.g. leadership MBTI training and all staff multicultural training) and initiatives such as the Lunch and

Learn Programme (2025) reinforcing the organisation's commitment to investing in its people. However, it was noted through staff consultation that a day-to-day learning culture is not yet well embedded within the organisation, and there is **an opportunity to improve the sharing of insights and learnings across teams to foster greater collaboration and continuous improvement**. A new performance management system is being introduced, which may further support clarity of expectations and growth.

Organisational Culture

Staff consistently describe the working environment at the Crop Trust as collegial and respectful, with strong interpersonal relationships and a shared sense of purpose across teams. As noted above, many individuals have remained with the organization for several years, contributing to a culture of loyalty and institutional continuity. Informal collaboration and peer support are seen as core strengths, with staff valuing the professionalism and integrity of their colleagues. This is reflected in the staff survey, where 70% of respondents reported feeling a sense of belonging within the Crop Trust, and **77% indicated they would recommend it as a good place to work** *(18% neutral, 5% disagree)*.

At the same time, perspectives on the broader organisational culture reveal a more nuanced picture. **While 66% of staff agreed (***23% neutral, 11% disagree)* **that the culture supports a positive working environment**, there are areas where staff indicate a desire for strengthened communication and clarity of decision making rights. 53% of staff agreed with the statement "I feel free to speak my mind without fear of negative consequences, (*24% neutral, 23% disagree)* indicating some opportunity for improvement in terms of psychological safety. A recurring theme in both interviews and survey comments was a perception that key strategic initiatives, such as internal restructuring, the development of the 2030 strategy, and the USD 3 million fundraising campaign, were communicated with limited staff engagement. Feedback indicates that more inclusive and predictable communication practices could help reinforce trust and buy-in.

Issues around recognition, performance management, and internal collaboration emerged as areas for improvement. The planned introduction of a new performance management system presents a valuable opportunity to enhance transparency, clarify expectations, and improve fairness. Similarly, internal collaboration remains a challenge, with only 32% of staff reporting effective cross-departmental cooperation. Feedback also highlighted the need for more regular team meetings and consistent follow-up on commitments made during engagement activities.

3.6 Efficiency of Processes and Systems

The Crop Trust has demonstrated a **strong commitment to continuous improvement, as evidenced by a willingness to review and evolve business processes**. The inefficiencies identified in a recent project and currently being addressed are in relation to the lack of formalised and documented processes. Many business functions at Crop Trust operated without clear Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), defined roles, or decision-making pathways. This has led to duplicated efforts, inconsistent execution, and confusion around responsibilities, particularly evident in processes such as finance budgeting and procurement approvals. It is notable that 50% of staff agreed with the statement 'the Crop Trust manages its resources efficiently.' *(24% neutral, 26% disagree)*.

The over-customisation of Salesforce to resolve process issues on a case-by-case basis is another symptom of inefficiency. This reactive approach means that systems are not being looked at from a strategic lens, and rather siloed responses to challenges that arise. Additionally, the absence of a dedicated CRM system that is well integrated into Salesforce has led to fragmented donor management, relying on multiple platforms like Box and Agora, which

complicates access to up-to-date information and limits the effectiveness of donor engagement efforts.

The manual nature of core financial processes, including budgeting and reporting, adds to the operational burden. Budget holders have shared feedback that they lack clear guidance and tools for budgeting leading to inefficiencies and finance team overreach. In response to this the Crop Trust has rolled out a budget management tool and training in 2025.

A major strength lies in the organisation's recognition of these challenges and its gradual adoption of digital tools such as Salesforce (Agora) and Power BI. These systems have added value and are appreciated by staff for their functionality and integration potential, particularly the introduction of Salesforce (Agora) where staff have pointed to it creating efficiencies, moving away from being a largely paper-based organisation. Additionally, Crop Trust's ongoing transition to Leapsome for performance management and development of a procurement module within Salesforce are commendable steps toward integrated process management. 64% of staff agree with the statement 'Technology is leveraged effectively to enhance efficiency and productivity *(25% neutral, 11% disagree).*

Recommendations

To implement the following recommendations, the review team suggests that they are supported by leadership alignment and strong change management practices to ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of any effort.

Governance and Management

1. Develop and implement a structured engagement strategy to enhance the relevance and impact of the Donors' Council.
    a. Develop a Board Development Plan to strengthen the Executive Board's capacity and diversity for future needs. Suggested actions include:
        i. Enhance regional representation on the Board (particularly from underrepresented regions such as Asia and the Middle East) as part of future appointment cycles; Broaden Board expertise in key forward-looking domains such as enterprise-wide risk management, business continuity, digital systems, and emerging technologies, as part of future appointment cycles; Strengthening investment oversight capabilities at the Board level; gaps and training opportunities for Board development i.e. including technology governance, global regulatory compliance, and sustainability considerations, supporting the Board's ability to navigate future challenges confidently.
2. Consider annual governance benchmarking:
    a. Consider external periodic Board and sub-committee effectiveness reviews
    b. Ensure performance and learning systems are in place for Board key decisions
    c. Consider membership of networks such as EFFIO to benefit from information sharing around best practices in relation to Endowment Fund governance and management.
3. Strengthen mechanisms for oversight of oCIO, such as the annual performance review process of Mercer. This could include the development of an assessment framework, an assessment report, including documentation of learning and actions taken.
4. Consider investments such as in-person Board retreats, to strengthen effectiveness of the Board.
5. Define clear operational or financial thresholds (such as budget size, staffing levels, or portfolio complexity) that would warrant the establishment of an internal audit function. This will allow the Crop Trust to align its assurance mechanisms with its evolving scale and risk profile in a structured, forward-looking manner.

Programs

6. Use the remaining four years of the current Strategy to gather information and test assumptions with regard to the Crop Trust's work to support national genebanks, in order to develop a clear ambition for national genebank support from 2030 and a clear understanding of the operating model requirements.
7. Update 2018 Costing Study.
8. Implement a process to review the Endowment Fund Disbursement Strategy. Develop internal policies to support implementation of the Disbursement Strategy, such as how the Disbursement Strategy is applied to national genebanks (e.g. approach to negotiation of co-funding with governments) and Crop Trust's approaches to prioritization of disbursement. Communicate effectively with partners.
9. Develop a long-term strategy for system wide services, including ambition and how it will be delivered, including addressing concerns around sustainability. Within this

strategy the Crop Trust could also explore models for greater engagement of international national genebanks (noting considerable effort is already placed on this).

10. Develop and roll-out a partnership policy, including Crop Trust's approach to partnership (focus on technical partners), categories of partners, partner selection processes, commitments, management framework, accountability mechanisms etc. Within these documents, detail approach and means of engagement of key partners, e.g. working with international genebanks to support national genebanks.
11. To address misperceptions, consider implementing a communications campaign targeted particularly at techncial partners. A number of the issues highlighted by partners during the review appear to be rooted in misunderstanding/lack of correct information. This campaign should be supported by a suite of policy documents that clearly detail Crop Trust's policy and practice.

Efficiency and Effectiveness

12. Develop and implement a strategy execution system that includes organizational KPIs (e.g. a quarterly scorecard & review discussion), reporting cycles (an opportunities to adapt/course correct), strategic allocation of resources and communication to strengthen performance management and staff engagement in organizational priorities. This system would streamline reporting to staff, Executive Board and sub-committees and if so wished, the Crop Trust could publish a quarterly dashboard.
13. While the 2025 Fundraising Strategy is a great success, it could be developed further to clearly articulate funding goals for Strategic Goal, and how these targets will be reached. More information could be provided within the Strategy in relation to Crop Trust's approach to diversification and the rationale and assumptions underpinning these. In line with the approach to diversification and as each donor type and specific funding mechanisms required different capabilities and management systems, the Crop Trust would benefit from breaking down the Funding Goals by donor type. Performance management of the strategy should be embedded in the strategy execution system as outline in Recommendation 12.
14. Consider developing a Annual Endowment Fund Financial Statement/Report (using existing data from Financial Statements) that is easily accessible, to use a tool to promote the Endowment Fund, strengthen transparency for current donors and stakeholders and attract new donors and partners.
15. Develop a policy to guide the allocation of Endowment Fund income withdrawals, for example: genebank grants: programme support costs: operational costs.
16. To strengthen financial management and ensure business continuity, develop financial modelling for the operating model required to achieve Strategic Goal targets. This information will support sustainability as well as ensuring the right funding streams are targeted.
17. Ensure that all relevant costs relating to overheads (e.g. the relevant operational costs of partnerships, communications) are allocated as overheads to avoid any distortion of overhead costs.
18. Review internal resource allocation to assess whether current departmental resourcing aligns with workload, functional complexity, and strategic priorities. In particular, review capacity within the Programmes team relative to its increasing delivery responsibilities, and the support demands that national genebanks require. Within this, examine the long-term sustainability of the Crop Trust's staffing model to evaluate the extent of reliance on short-term consultants and consider alternative workforce models (e.g. long-term contractors in partner regions) that support greater internal capacity, institutional knowledge retention, and geographic reach particularly in regions where the Crop Trust delivers projects.

19. Review communications materials and campaigns to ensure that the essential operations of genebanks are sufficiently represented. Recognizing that donors and the public can more easily relate to results at the food security level (Crop Trust impact indicators), it is important also to showcase the importance of genebanks. Crop Trust could have a specific campaign, have a video portal on the website that shows the work of the genebank, target specific groups, researchers, universities, global education programmes to partner on this promotion.
20. It is recognized that the leadership team are focused on strengthening the culture of the organization and an initiative is underway. It is recommended that developing a learning culture is embedded in this initiative and it is also recommended that measurement of this initiative is included in the strategy execution system as noted above, with engagement of staff in the measurement tool.

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Annex 1 – Crop Trust Mandate

The Crop Trust Constitution: Article 2 Objective of the Trust

(1) The objective of the Trust is to ensure the long-term conservation and availability of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture with a view to achieving global food security and sustainable agriculture.

(2) The Trust shall in particular, without prejudice to the generality of the foregoing,

(a) endeavour to safeguard collections of unique and valuable plant genetic resources for food and agriculture held *ex situ* , with priority being given to those that are plant genetic resources included in Annex I to the International Treaty or referred to in Article 15.1(b) of the International Treaty ;

(b) promote an efficient goal-oriented, economically efficient and sustainable global system of *ex situ* conservation in accordance with the International Treaty and the Global Plan of Action for the Conservation and Sustainable Utilization of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (hereinafter referred to as "the Global Plan of Action");

(c) promote the regeneration, characterization, documentation and evaluation of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture and the exchange of related information;

(d) promote the availability of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture; and

(e) promote national and regional capacity building, including the training of key personnel, with respect to the above.

Annex 2 – Crop Trust Timeline and Milestones

Timeline of key achievements, changes and inflection over the period 2005 to 2024 of t he Crop Trust. Information was extracted from the Crop Trust Annual Report from 2005 to 2024 and discussions with staff and partners.

Year	Key events/ inflection points	EF level
2004	• The Crop Trust became a legal entity	
2005	• Cary Fowler replaces Geoff Hawtin as Executive Secretary. • Donors' Council holds its first meeting.	EF USD 31.8 million.
2006	• First long-term conservation grant of USD 100,000 annually for IRRI. • Conservation strategies developed for banana, rice and wheat. • Governing Body of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture recognised the Crop Trust as an essential element of its funding strategy.	EF USD 45.5 million.
2007	• Executive Board established with first meeting. • Emphasis on crop diversity for climate adaptation. • Trust entered into agreement with the Government of Norway and NordGen (the genetic resources centre of	EF USD 82.7 million.

Year	Key events/ inflection points	EF level
	the Nordic countries) concerning the management Svalbard Global Seed Vault. ● USD 30 million from Gates. ● Development of information system to support genebank management and global accessibility for plant breeders.	
2008	● Formal opening of Svalbard, 320,553 unique seed collections of which 241,495 supported by the Crop Trust. ● Perpetual funding for collections of cassava, wheat, barley, banana and yam. ● Supported cryopreservation protocols for cassava, sweet potato, yam and coconut. ● Donors' Council endorsement of Fund Disbursement Strategy.	EF USD 82.5 million (
2009	● Supported shipment of 127,704 seed samples to Svalbard. Total number in Svalbard reached 491,526 accessions of which 369,199 supported by Trust. ● Launched competitive call for collection of crop wild relatives and land races missing from genebanks. ● Developing GENESYS online portal linking genebanks. ● Strengthening collaboration with ITPGRFA Governing Body – endorsement of the Fund Disbursement Strategy. ● Call for action to conserve crop diversity for food security in the face of climate change.	EF USD 94.4 million
2010	● New 10 year initiative launched (Crop Wild Relatives) to identify, collect, catalog, and conserve the wild varieties of essential food crops. Aims to integrate this diversity into crop breeding pipelines. ● Trust initiated a long-term grant to provide perpetual funding for most critical maize collection. ● Trust facilitated deposit of 91,338 crop samples from international collections and an additional 5,877 samples from national collections into the Svalbard Global Seed Vault. Total number of samples deposited through Crop Trust support to 466,414 by the end of the year bring the total number of accessions to 603,159 accessions. ● Trust continues to coordinate the development of conservation strategies for 24 different crops.	EF USD 120 million

Year	Key events/ inflection points	EF level
	• Pilot project initiated across three countries to enhance the connection between crop conservation and its practical use, aiming to better link genebanks with farmers.	
2011	• Rescue and regeneration of threatened collections aimed to regenerate 95,000 accessions across 246 collections of 22 crops. 74,410 accessions (61,969 seed and 12,441 vegetative accessions) successfully regenerated. • Svalbard Global Seed Vault held a total of 716,523 accessions, with the Crop Trust funding the deposit of 540,353 of these (including almost 73,939 in 2011 alone). • Trust had established in-perpetuity support (grants funded through its endowment) for collections of 15 crops, including rice, cassava, wheat, barley, faba bean, pearl millet, maize, forages, banana, aroids, grass pea, sorghum, yam, and lentil.	EF USD 119.97 million.
2012	• 5 year agenda to rescue of nearly 80,000 crop accessions that were at risk and duplication of 43,676 samples in international genebanks. • Backup 75% of CGIAR accession in Svalbard Seed Vault bringing the total number of samples safely stored to 774,600. The safety duplication of more than half of these into international genebanks. • Launched 10-year partnership to conserve crop wild relatives of 29 major crops, identifying gaps in conservation and creating a database with over 5 million records. • Characterised 59 collections for climate related traits that included drought tolerance and pest resistance, making data available online for breeders. • Deployed GRIN-Global software for genebank management and expanded GeneSys with data on 2.3 million accessions. • The Genebank CRP commenced • Marie Haga appointed as Executive Director, succeeding Cary Fowler. • Aim to fully fund CGIAR genebanks through the endowment by 2017.	EF USD 139.6 million.
2013	• Crop Trust moved its headquarters to Bonn, Germany, gaining legal status as an independent entity in Germany . • Svalbard Global Seed Vault collection of crop diversity increased to 801,752 accessions.	EF USD 169.5 million.

Year	Key events/ inflection points	EF level
	• CWR project funded by the Norway government initiative identified 450 high-priority CWRs for collection and conservation. • Strategic Work Plan developed for 2014 – 2024.	
2014	• Celebrated 10th Anniversary of the Crop Trust. • Additional accessions added through the Crop Trust funded activities reached 38,052 bringing the total conserved in Svalbard to 839,801 • Accessions added to Genesys in 2014 were 430,021 bringing the total to 2.77 million records. • GRIN-Global deployed in three pilot projects to improve genebank data management. • Crop Wild Relatives (CWR) Project, deposited 204 accessions in the Millennium Seed Bank. Pre-breeding efforts focused on rice, sunflower, potato, lentil, and chickpea. • Highlighted the cost of conserving one accession in international collections forever equivalent to USD 625.	EF USD 169.7 million
2015	• Retrieved 38,073 samples for the first time to reconstruct ICARDA's collection in Morocco and Lebanon. • Deposited 36,130 accessions in Svalbard bring the total to 837,858. • Supported 12 collections under the Global Genebank Partnership, holding over 750,000 accessions. • Indigenous Andean farmers 750 deposit potato varieties. • Conservation strategies developed for apple, Bambara groundnut and forages. • CIP (Peru) and IITA (Nigeria) set up equipment to manufacture liquid nitrogen for cryobanking. • Addressed threats to the South Pacific coconut genebank in Papua New Guinea. • Genesys portal providing access to over 6 million genebank accessions globally. • GRIN-Global extended for direct publishing of accession data. • Tailored quality management systems for genebanks developed.	EF USD 157.3 million.

Year	Key events/ inflection points	EF level
	• His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales was confirmed as Patron .	
2016	• A further 42,979 new accessions were added to Svalbard Global Seed Vault bring the total to 880,837 accessions conserved. • Crop Wild Relatives (CWR) Project Gap analysis published in Nature Plants, revealing significant underrepresentation of wild relatives in genebanks. Pre-breeding projects concluded for rice, sunflower, and eggplant. • Transition from the Genebank CRP (2012-2016) to the CGIAR Genebank Platform (2017-2021). • Implementation of barcoding and data management systems to improve efficiency. • Genesys portal expanded to include 3.6 million accession records.	EF USD 188 million.
2017	• An additional 64,403 accessions were added to the Svalbard Seed Vault bringing the total number of accessions safe stored to 890,886 accessions. • CGIAR Genebank Platform supporting 11 genebanks managing 774,000 accessions • National and Regional genebanks supported including Yemen, Nepal, and Kenya. • Development of conservation strategy for coffee. • Hosted events at COP23 and G20 meetings to engage governments and private sector stakeholders. • Launched the Food Forever Initiative to promote agricultural biodiversity. Promotes SDG Target 2.5 to safeguard genetic diversity.	EF USD 280 million.
2018	• 92,638 accessions added to the Svalbard Global Seed Vault bringing the total to 983,524 seed accessions safely stored. • Svalbard Seed Vault celebrated its 10th Anniversary. • IRRI's rice genebank became the first recipient of an LPA with the Crop Trust. • Developed conservation strategies for tea and citrus. • Genes ys online database expands information on 4 million samples and Genes ys Catalog provides detailed data on characterization & evaluation traits that included	EF USD 273 million.

Year	Key events/ inflection points	EF level
	seed color and drought tolerance, with over 2,100 datasets available. ● Donors' Council established a Working Group on Innovative Finance to explore mechanisms for sustainable funding. Finland and the European Commission new members.	
2019	● Svalbard Global Seed Vault received 30,000 seed samples through Trust support bringing the total to 992,032 accessions safely stored. ● Norway invested EUR 20 million to upgrade the Svalbard facility, including a watertight tunnel and improved cooling systems. ● Seeds4Resilience Project launched to support five national genebanks in Africa (Nigeria, Zambia, Kenya, Ethiopia, Ghana). Focused on upgrading equipment, improving processes, and enhancing staff capacity to conserve local crops like sorghum and millets. ● CGIAR Genebank Platform completed the third year of its five-year programme, ensuring efficient operations and high conservation standards. Innovations include imaging-based germination scoring systems and the GreenPass system for streamlined phytosanitary assurance. ● Genesys undergoes major upgrades including full-text search, image hosting, and tailored subsets for specific needs. Over 3 million accession records updated, with 160,000 images now available. ● Food Forever Initiative undertook nine events to raise awareness of SDG Target 2.5, promoting crop diversity through innovative culinary experiences. ● New Executive Director Stefan Schmitz appointed.	EF USD 313 million.
2020	● COVID-19 disrupted all aspects of the Crop Trust's work. ● Svalbard Seed Vault Deposits included 82,501 seed samples from Trust funded activities bringing the total to 1,074,533 samples safeguarded. ● Crop Wild Relatives (CWR) Project resulted in drought-tolerant alfalfa varieties and new durum wheat lines. ● Templeton World Charity Foundation support to pre-breeding in grasspea and finger millet. ● Svalbard Global Seed Vault, launched a 100-year experiment to study seed longevity.	EF USD 365.5 million.

Year	Key events/ inflection points	EF level
	• Genes ys expanded to host over 4 million accessions and improved user accessibility. • GRIN-Global Community Edition enhanced genebank inventory management with mobile and barcoding support.	
2021	• Closure of CGIAR Genebank Platform that constituted 11 international genebanks. Key outputs included advanced technologies developed including smart labelling and genetic markers. Distributed nearly 1 million seed samples to 166 countries since 2012. • Completion of Crop Wild Relatives (CWR) project, after 11 years, funded by Norway. Developed over 14,000 climate-resilient breeding lines, freely available under the ITPGRFA. Released new crop varieties, including blight-resistant potatoes (CIPMatilde), and pest-resistant rice. Trained over 12,000 individuals from 124 institutions across 71 countries. • Launch of the BOLD initiative, a 10-year, USD 58 million project funded by Norway that focuses on pre-breeding, climate-resilient crops, farmer access to crop diversity, and safeguarding collections in the Svalbard Global Seed Vault. • Templeton World Charity Foundation initiative developed genetic markers for grasspea and released a new finger millet database. • Seeds4Resilience project supported genebanks in Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, and Zambia developed conservation standards, procured equipment and supported rebuilding Zambia's sweetpotato collection lost to drought. • Svalbard Global Seed Vault received 82,501 seed samples from Trust- funded activities increased the total number of accessions safeguarded to 1,125,419 samples. • Genes ys Platform reaches 3,532,430 records updated enabling global access to plant materials. • Emergency Reserve launched to provide rapid funding for genebanks in crisis. Supported the Philippine genebank affected by Typhoon Xangsane. • World Vegetable Center (WorldVeg) signed an MoU to safeguard vegetable diversity, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. Released a 10-year rescue plan for fruit and vegetable biodiversity. • Germany provided funding to support a three-year project to strengthen the Crop Trust's Endowment Fund and global awareness.	EF USD 339 million.

Year	Key events/ inflection points	EF level
	• Catherine Bertini succeeded Sir Peter Crane as Chair of Executive Board.	
2022	• Svalbard Global Seed Vault received 85,000 seed samples and grew the total seeds safeguarded to 1,194,944. • Morocco releases Jabal, a drought-tolerant wheat that has its roots in the CWR project. • Commenced the continuation of the Crop Strategies Project with funding from BLE (2022 – 2025) • First Crop Diversity Day held in Bonn • Sweet potato Project with Darwin Initiative funding preserved sweet potato landraces from Madagascar and Zambia, cleaned them of diseases, and trained national programs in conservation techniques. • Grasspea and Finger Millet Project developed improved breeding lines for these crops, focusing on nutrition and resilience. • Updated two conservation strategies (potato, sorghum) and developed five new ones (brassicas, peppers, eggplant, pea, peanut). • Signed a memorandum of understanding with One-CGIAR.	EF USD 277 million
2023	• IRRI extended their LPA for 5 years guaranteeing USD 1.4 million annually for rice conservation. • LPAs were granted to CIAT and IITA • Crop Trust Strategic Plan under the "Food Forever" vision to 2030 developed. • Global Crop Diversity Summit held in November 2023, in Berlin under the patronage of German President. • Svalbard Global Seed Vault celebrated its 15th anniversary in 2023. Total number of samples in Svalbard Global Seed Vault reached 1,195,244 with an additional 69,825 seed samples being deposited. • Emergency Genebank support provided to genebanks in Sudan and Laos. • BOLDER (Building Opportunities for Lesser-known Diversity in Edible Resources) launched at COP28 to enhance conservation and use of neglected crops that included millets and Bambara groundnut. Targets food security and climate resilience in Benin, Ghana, Tanzania, and Uganda.	EF USD 305 million.

Year	Key events/ inflection points	EF level
2024	• Crop Trust celebrated its 20th anniversary. • 64,000 seed samples were added to the Svalbard Global Seed • Founding Executive Directors Dr. Geoffrey Hawtin and Dr. Cary Fowler received the 2024 World Food Prize. • AfricaRice became eligible for a Long-Term Partnership Agreement (LPA) starting in 2025. • Continued support for 15 international genebanks and enhanced data management through platforms like GeneSys and GGCE. • Seeds4Resilience resulted in the safe duplication of 1,500 accessions in Svalbard. • Sweetpotato Project distributed clean vines to farmers in Madagascar and Zambia, improving yields under drought conditions. Transferred 64 landraces to CIP for long-term storage. • Emergency Reserve for Genebanks provided USD 90,000 to safeguard collections in Sudan and the Philippines.	EF USD 357 million.

Annex 3: Examples of Impact

Impact of the Crop Wild Relatives Project

The effectiveness of the CWR Project is best demonstrated through the significant outputs and outcomes achieved. These include but not limited to:

The conservation of crop wild relatives: By the end of 2021, 4,264 new unique CWR accessions were successfully collected and conserved in national and international genebanks, logged on Genesys, ensuring their long-term availability for breeding and research (Crop Trust, 2021). The safe duplication of collected materials was achieved through deposits in Kew Gardens Millennium Seed Bank (MSB) and the Svalbard Global Seed Vault.

Successful development of pre-breeding genetic materials: The pre-breeding activities of the project resulted in advanced lines with traits that included tolerance to abiotic and resistance to biotic stresses. Enhanced technical, institutional, and human capacity of national genebanks and breeding programs through training, equipment, and collaboration. There were more than 30 PhD students and over 50 post-graduate researchers that contributed to pre-breeding projects, increasing efficiency and sustainability in the field of plant breeding.

Global collaboration: Strengthened partnerships between national genebanks, CGIAR Centres, advanced research organizations, and universities across 56 countries. It fostered collaboration between genebanks and herbaria, research institutions, and local partners, creating a global framework for CWR conservation and use.

Integration with the Multilateral System (MLS): Partner countries actively contributed to the MLS by sharing collected CWR materials under the Standard Material Transfer Agreement (SMTA), marking a significant achievement in global access and benefit-sharing.

Increased knowledge and awareness: Enhanced understanding of genetic diversity in CWR species and their potential for climate change adaptation. It raised awareness among policymakers, decision-makers, and the general public about the importance of CWR for food security and climate resilience.

Impact on global frameworks: Contributed to the objectives of the Treaty and the Global Plan of Action (GPA), reinforcing global efforts in genetic resource conservation and use.

Impact of the BOLD Project

The BOLD Project supported 15 national genebanks with capacity building, equipment, and training; regenerated and safely duplicated thousands of crop accessions at the Svalbard Global Seed Vault, improved genebank operations through QMS and data management tools GGCE and Genesys; and developed and released new climate-resilient cultivars of seven crops (e.g., drought-tolerant durum wheat, disease-resistant potato) through pre-breeding and participatory evaluations. The Project has promoted the use of crop wild relatives to address challenges that include drought, heat, and disease resistance and has initiated efforts to increase the production and consumption of neglected and underutilized species in Africa, focusing on crops that included millets, grasspea, and traditional leafy vegetables.

The Project has successfully released several crop varieties that incorporate traits from crop wild relatives. These include JABAL a drought-tolerant durum wheat variety released in Morocco and a further two additional durum wheat cultivars released in Iran and one in Syria in 2023, totalling six durum wheat cultivars over two years. CIP-MATILDE a disease-resistant potato variety released in Peru in 2022. A new alfalfa cultivar developed under the Crop Wild Relatives Project was released in Chile and less dormant alfalfa cultivars adopted by farmers in Central Asia (Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan), improving yields and reducing irrigation needs. A wild relative-derived grasspea line has been selected as a candidate in all-India trials, with potential adoption in Bangladesh and Nepal, and four promising rice pre-breeding candidate lines advancing toward release as varieties in the Mekong Delta.

The BOLD Project has made significant advances in safeguarding crop diversity, enhancing its use, and addressing global challenges like climate change and food security (Christiansen et al., 2024).

Impact of CIMMYT Australia ICARDA Germplasm Evaluation (CAIGE) Programme

Bread wheat germplasm accessed from CIMMYT and ICARDA by Australian wheat breeders and researchers through the CIMMYT Australia ICARDA Germplasm Evaluation (CAIGE) program has had a significant impact on the wheat sector in Australia, both genetically and economically. The CAIGE program has enhanced the acquisition of diverse, high-yielding, and disease-resistant wheat germplasm adapted to Australian conditions. It facilitated the identification of materials with superior yield and disease resistance compared to local cultivars. The program improved the capture and dissemination of information, enabling Australian wheat breeders to access detailed data on imported germplasm, including yield, disease resistance, and genetic markers. A significant percentage of CAIGE materials showed resistance to key diseases such as stem rust (93%), leaf rust (81%), and stripe rust (73%), among others. This has reduced the risk of disease outbreaks and improved crop resilience. The program provided Australian breeders with access to unique genetic diversity from CIMMYT and ICARDA, which has been used for both direct cultivar release and as parents in breeding programs. CAIGE-derived cultivars demonstrated a yield advantage of 1.4% over non-CAIGE cultivars, contributing to increased wheat production in Australia. The benefit-cost ratio of the CAIGE program was calculated at 20:1, meaning that for every dollar invested, USD 20 in benefits were generated. The internal rate of return was estimated at 163%. By 2018–2019, 71% of Australian wheat production was derived from CAIGE-related cultivars, highlighting the widespread adoption of these materials. CAIGE materials with enhanced disease resistance reduced the need for chemical applications, lowering production costs for farmers (Trethowan R.M., et al. 2024).

Impact of IRRI and crop diversity for rice research

The International Rice Genebank (IRG) was established in 1971 by the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) after initiating the first wide-scale collection of rice genetic resources in 1962. IRG currently safeguards the largest and most diverse collection of rice genetic resources globally. Many of these genetic resources have benefitted international rice research programs and the National Agricultural Research and Extension System (NARES) that aim to advance work on crop improvement. Over the past decades, genetic resources from the IRG have been used effectively to increase smallholder farmers' rice productivity in developing economies (Evenson and Gollin 1997; Gollin and Evenson 1998; Hossain et al. 2003; Villanueva et al. 2020). A recent study evaluated the impact of the IRG on rice productivity in Bangladesh by analysing the pathways of germplasm transfers, their genetic contributions to improved rice varieties, and the resulting economic benefits. On average, 52% of the genetic composition of improved rice varieties cultivated by Bangladeshi farmers came from IRG accessions, increasing to 67%, when possible, contributions were included. A 1% increase in definite IRG contribution to improved rice varieties resulted in a 0.99% increase in rice yield that translated into an aggregated net benefit of USD 8,576,973 for farmers during a single wet season in Bangladesh. Enhanced yield was linked to important agronomic traits contributed by IRG accessions in the genetic background of improved rice varieties. IRG accessions significantly contributed to the ancestry of improved rice varieties, leading to increased yields and economic benefits for farmers. The study underscores the critical role of IRG in conserving and distributing genetic resources for rice research, development, and production in Bangladesh (Villanueva et al., 2022).

Impact of Investments in Plant Genetic Resources makes Sound Economic Sense for US Farmers

For the past 50 years, wheat has been a core focus of CGIAR's research. CGIAR receives annual funding of about USD 30 million for wheat, and the economic benefits of this research range from USD 2.2 to USD 3.1 billion, resulting in a benefit-cost ratio of at least 73 to 1. This means that for every dollar spent on CGIAR wheat research, there is more than USD 73 in economic benefits to global wheat farmers. CIMMYT's international wheat improvement programs generate USD 500 million per year in economic benefits. Globally, nearly half of the wheat varieties planted are CGIAR-related, and in South, Central, and West Asia and North Africa, this number rises to 70 to 80 percent. Wheat supplies 20 percent of protein and calories in diets worldwide, making CGIAR wheat research impactful on the livelihoods of the world's poorest people.

CGIAR Research Centres have also led to significant benefits for U.S. farmers. Approximately 60 percent of the wheat acreage planted in the U.S. uses CGIAR-related wheat varieties. CIMMYT wheat improvement spillovers in the United States repay the total U.S. contribution to CIMMYT's wheat improvement research budget by a rate of up to 40 to 1. Another partner, the International Centre for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA), has delivered innovations that protect U.S. farmers from crop losses due to destructive pests and has partnered with CIMMYT to develop the One Global Wheat Program under CGIAR.

Source: https://www.uswheat.org

Management Response

The objective of the external review was to assess the Crop Trust's governance and leadership, program impact, and organisational effectiveness and efficiency. It aimed to assess the organisation's achievements over the past decade and provide forward-looking guidance for the next five years.

Management welcomes the overall findings of the report, which provides a thorough and independent assessment of the organisation's governance, performance and strategic direction. Management is pleased to note the report's overarching conclusions:

- *"The Crop Trust is found to be a highly effective, resilient, and globally respected organization, demonstrating clear impact in conserving and improving the plant genetic resources for global food security."*
- *"… the Crop Trust has achieved considerable success in recent years in fulfilling this comprehensive Constitutional mandate."*
- *"… the Crop Trust is found to be a well-governed organization."*

Management regards the report as clear confirmation that the strategic path taken in recent years is the right one, and as unequivocal encouragement to continue along this path in the years to come. In this context, management also recognises that the recommendations given in the report provide a constructive framework for further action to strengthen the organisation's overall impact and sustainability.

Chapters 1 to 3 below summarise management's response to each of the three sections covered in the report, before Chapter 4 provides management's consolidated response to the individual recommendations made in the report. Several of the proposed actions are already being implemented, or are planned within ongoing initiatives, while others will be considered as part of future workplans and strategic reviews.

1. Governance and Management

Management welcomes the review's finding that the Crop Trust is a well-governed organisation, with a clearly defined Executive Board established in line with the Constitution and supported by three specialized sub-committees. The review notes that these structures provide targeted expertise, informed decision-making, and strong oversight, reflecting governance best practice. Moreover, the review observes that governance policies and documentation are well established and aligned with the constitutional framework, supporting sound and consistent governance processes.

The Executive Board demonstrates a high level of engagement and commitment, which is mirrored by leadership's strong accountability to the Board. Management is seen as responsive to governance direction and ensures timely delivery of Board requests. Such a dynamic fosters effective oversight, transparency, and mutual accountability, key elements of the Crop Trust's ongoing governance strength.

Looking ahead, management will continue to review governance practices to ensure they remain fit for purpose, agile, and responsive to the organisation's evolving strategic objectives and operational context.

Management recognises the importance of strengthening the profile and engagement of the Donors' Council. While the Council continues to provide valuable guidance, there is untapped potential for broader and more strategic involvement from its full membership. Management has already taken steps in this direction and is committed to further developing structured mechanisms for communication, collaboration, and input. These efforts aim to deepen engagement and fully leverage the Council's expertise to support the Crop Trust's strategic priorities and long-term impact.

2. Program Impact

The Crop Trust is both a grant-making and a technical implementation agency, i.e. it provides financial support as well as technical assistance. These two support functions are linked to specific sources of funding:

- The main source of funding for financial support are the proceeds from the endowment fund, i.e. as a grant-making agency, the Crop Trust acts primarily in its capacity as an independent (secondary) donor. In addition, however, project funds also contribute to a lesser extent to the grant-making.
- The main source of funding for technical assistance is time-bound project financing. In addition, however, proceeds from the endowment also contribute to a limited extent to the provision of technical support.

Apart from some time-bound financial support ("emergency grants" and project-related cash transfers), the financial support provided by the Crop Trust is typically long-term in nature. This support is provided based on long-term agreements, which are generally renewed as long as the eligibility criteria continue to be met. These 'in perpetuity' financing arrangements reflect the fact that the conservation of crop diversity in genebanks must be secured for the long term and therefore the 'essential operations' (storage, safety duplication, regeneration, characterisation, monitoring, data management, acquisition and distribution) required for this must be maintained without pause. Ongoing income from the assets of a perpetual foundation, such as the Crop Trust endowment, is the appropriate instrument for this purpose.

When financing "essential operations", the Crop Trust distinguishes between so-called long-term grants (LTGs), which only covers selected elements of these operations, and so-called long-term partnership agreements (LPAs), which covers the entire spectrum of essential operations and aims at providing full financing or at least near-full financing of these operations.

In addition to, and complementary to, financial support, the Crop Trust also provides technical assistance. This technical assistance for genebanks covers a broad range of in-kind (i.e. non-cash) contributions, which fall into two categories: (1) bilateral support directed at individual genebanks and (2) system-wide services that benefit the global system of

genebanks as a coherent whole. Bilateral support typically paves the way for subsequent financial support. The capacity-building measures involved in such 'upgrading' of genebanks relate to the entire spectrum of genebank infrastructure, equipment and operations, as needed by individual genebanks. In contrast, the Crop Trust's system-wide services explicitly and directly support the establishment and functioning of the efficient, goal-oriented and sustainable global genebank system called for by the Crop Trust's Constitution, and indeed the Global Plan of Action on PGRFA and the Plant Treaty. The most important activities are the development of system-wide information systems, quality management systems, training programmes and crop conservation strategies. While bilateral support within the framework of technical assistance is financed exclusively through projects, system-wide services are financed partly through projects and partly through income from the endowment.

2030 Strategic Plan

The main objective of the Crop Trust 2030 Strategic Plan, published in 2023, was to set clear priorities until 2030: to strike a balance between financial and technical cooperation, between supporting national and international genebanks, and between bilateral support and system-wide services.

Management is pleased to note that the report appreciates the 2030 Strategic Plan as a decisive tool to "*translate the Trust's constitutional mandates into actionable strategies and measurable goals. … The Plan reinforces capacity building, financial sustainability, and global partnerships while integrating other priorities such as climate resilience, biodiversity protection, and institutional effectiveness. In doing so, it both adheres to and advances the constitutional objectives, ensuring the Trust's continued strategic relevance in safeguarding crop diversity for global food security."*

Overall Impact

Management welcomes the review's finding that the work of the Crop Trust and its strategic priorities are well aligned with its Constitution and highly relevant to the pursuit of global food security, and that Crop Trust's programs have demonstrated high relevance, effectiveness, and measurable impact.

In particular, management is pleased to note that technical partners expressed strong satisfaction with the support provided by Crop Trust: "100% *of survey respondents agreed that Crop Trust adds significant value to the conservation of crop genetic resources through its work and partnerships. Several partners highlighted the technical support they received for different crops as valuable. 95% of respondents agreed that their organisation has a strong, collaborative relationship with the Crop Trust and qualitative comments reinforced the respondents' strong appreciation for their partnership with the Crop Trust.*"

Financial Support to International Genebanks

Goal 1 of the Crop Trust 2030 Strategic Plan states that financial cooperation designed to provide long-term support will be limited to international genebanks until 2030, and that full-fledged long-term partnership agreements (LPAs) will be concluded with all international genebanks by that date.

Management welcomes the finding that the long-term financing agreements are an effective mechanism to support achievement of Crop Trust's mission and are highly valued by partners. Those agreements "*provide critical financial stability for international genebanks, enabling them to maintain routine operations, upgrade infrastructure, and manage key crop collections. … Partners consistently report that these funds are essential lifelines and they would struggle to secure similar support from other funding sources.*" It is particularly noteworthy that all beneficiary genebanks welcome the financial support provided by the Crop Trust. One international genebank commented that "*Crop Trust's financial assistance in the last three years has been helpful to sustain minimal routine Genebank activities at a time when the Genebank had no other funding*", highlighting the crucial importance of sustained Crop Trust funding.

Technical Cooperation with National Genebanks

Goal 2 of the Crop Trust 2030 Strategic Plan states that, until 2030, bilateral support for national genebanks will be limited to technical cooperation financed through projects.

Management is pleased with the report's recognition that the Crop Trust's work with national genebanks is demonstrating positive results, based on a broad spectrum of technical assistance. Reflecting on the effectiveness of project activities overall, 100% of external partners surveyed felt that the Crop Trust could demonstrate "*positive results in terms of increasing global awareness of the importance of crop diversity*".

Management agrees with the report's finding that there is room for improvement in the targeting of projects. Continuous evaluation and regular reporting on ongoing projects provide a framework for learning and self-regulation, which ensures that projects are improved in theory and practice.

System-wide Services

The Crop Trust 2030 Strategic Plan clearly states that support for system-wide services underpins support for individual genebanks and is essential for building an efficient, goal-oriented and sustainable global genebank system.

Management is pleased that the review acknowledges the strong progress made in supporting system-wide services, e.g. establishing genebank information systems, quality management systems and crop conservation strategies: "*System-wide services have strengthened global standards, built technical capacity, improved data management, and informed global crop conservation strategies, ensuring coherence and sustainability in ex situ conservation efforts.*"

Management takes this clearly positive assessment as encouragement to more consistently draw the attention of a wider public to our often overlooked achievements in this area, and to target potential donors to provide funding for these highly effective services.

3. Efficiency and Effectiveness

Finance and Endowment Fund

Management welcomes the review's findings confirming the organisation's sound financial management, robust financial policies, and the continued strengthening of risk management practices over the review period. The review also highlights the strong governance framework in place for the endowment fund. Management notes the clear recognition of the Investment Committee's commitment and expertise, which enable it to fulfil its responsibilities effectively. The benefits of using the outsourced Chief Investment Officer (oCIO) model are evident, with the partnership providing the Crop Trust with access to deep investment expertise, market insights, and advanced analytical tools, enhancing the quality of investment decision-making, portfolio management, risk monitoring and reporting.

Management agrees that oversight mechanisms could be further enhanced by formalising the documentation of the annual performance review of the oCIO, including the development of a structured assessment framework.

Management also agrees with the recommendation to define thresholds for when an internal audit function might be warranted. While management and FRAC currently monitor this, clear parameters would strengthen the assurance framework as the organization evolves.

Finally, while existing guidelines inform endowment fund income withdrawals, management recognises the opportunity to enhance transparency through written guidance outlining how income is allocated across workstreams.

Fundraising

Management is pleased with the report's recognition that "in terms of fundraising capability, the Crop Trust demonstrates clear strengths, notably in its strong donor relationships and reputation for professionalism, responsiveness, and financial accountability." At the same time, management is convinced that a more in-depth, strategic analysis of the Crop Trust's objectives and activities in resource mobilization over the last ten years would have provided a clearer and more targeted basis for recommendations on the further direction of resource mobilization in the coming years.

The Crop Trust's resource mobilization was long characterized by the belief that a few large donors committed to the Crop Trust's mission would be sufficient to raise the necessary funds. A dramatic decline in donor contributions in 2014 and 2015, the first of its kind, led to the realization that the Crop Trust would have to look at a broader spectrum of potential sources of income in order to fulfil its mandate. From 2016 onwards, when hopes for large donations from a few donors proved increasingly illusory, the Crop Trust placed increasing

expectations on so-called “innovative financing” for several years. Spurred by very low interest rates in the capital markets, the core idea was to mobilize very cheap money by issuing large-volume bonds, which would be invested on the capital market with expectations of higher returns, and the "spread" would be added to the endowment as profit. All major donors encouraged the Crop Trust to explore such opportunities. From today's perspective, this path must be considered a mistake. The ideas behind this were not only based on unrealistic financial assumptions, but also led the Crop Trust's traditional donors to believe that they had finally fulfilled their duty and could now leave the fate of the Crop Trust in the hands of the capital market.

Against this backdrop, in 2021 the Crop Trust began considering a fundamental reorganization of its resource mobilization efforts. Thanks to three years of support by the German government, numerous analyses and feasibility studies were carried out. The findings from this project can be summarized as follows:

- In order to achieve the Crop Trust's funding targets, which are necessary for the long-term fulfilment of its mandate, the continued support of traditional donors remains essential.
- At the same time, there is an urgent need to broaden the base of potential donors in several directions. Diversification of the donor base concerns both non-traditional sovereign donors (e.g. India, Brazil, countries in the Middle East) and non-governmental donors.
- Opportunities for innovative financing should continue to be monitored and explored. They can be useful additions to the resource mobilization portfolio, but given the structure of the Crop Trust and its lack of revenue generating activities, they can never replace the fundraising efforts for grants from sovereign donors.
- It is not enough to entrust resource mobilization to individual Crop Trust employees or even individual external consultants. Rather, a structural change in the institutional culture of the Crop Trust is necessary. Fundraising must become part of its DNA and a matter that challenges all employees equally.
- These findings ultimately mean that the Crop Trust will have to prepare itself to invest more in fundraising over a longer period of time.

All these findings have guided the Crop Trust's resource mobilization activities since 2023, and have been incorporated into a Resource Mobilisation Plan, which management presented to the Executive Board at its meeting in February 2025 and which now serves as a guideline for all further activities. The activities to date can already be considered successful. Most donations received in 2024 would have been unthinkable without this increased effort.

Management also recognizes that agility and adaptability are required in the implementation of the current Resource Mobilisation Plan given rapid shifts in the landscape. Such increased efforts were already essential for the Crop Trust before the severe disruptions in the donor landscape in 2025 that the report explicitly points out. Now, confronted with reduced aid budgets, weakened multilateralism and increased geopolitical uncertainty, they are even more imperative.

In accordance with the report's recommendation, management will look to deepen insights into specific funding goals and fundraising pathways by donor type as it builds upon more detailed donor market intelligence being collected and tracked by the team.

The review refers to an alleged conflict of interest and objectives between fundraising for the endowment and mobilizing resources for new projects. Management would like to make it clear that it doesn't see any indication of this. On the contrary, evidence shows that both efforts complement and reinforce each other. For example, management points out that the two largest donors to the Crop Trust, Germany and Norway, both contribute to the endowment *and* provide project funding.

The Crop Trust's Constitution explicitly recognises both sources of funding - proceeds from the endowment and project funds - as complementary instruments. One of the Crop Trust's great strengths and unique selling points is its ability to draw on both sources and offer tailor-made support. The Crop Trust's resource mobilisation strategy is guided by clearly defined criteria as to when and which form of request for donations is used. Fundraising for the endowment takes priority. However, it is a fact that a considerable number of donors either have no legal means, or no strategic interest, in contributing to the endowment. The Crop Trust takes this into account by offering both modalities.

Communications

Goal 3 of the Crop Trust 2030 Strategic Plan targets "Increasing Global Awareness of the Importance of Crop Diversity". Management welcomes the report's finding that "*The Crop Trust has raised global awareness of crop diversity and the importance of conservation. The Svalbard Vault has emerged as a compelling communications tool, consistently cited by partners as a symbol of the organization's mission.*" In particular, management agrees with the report's assessment that communications at the Crop Trust "*have improved notably over the review period, with a stronger strategic focus and greater emphasis on visibility. Efforts to leverage high-profile events and sharpen messaging have contributed to raising awareness of the organisation's mission, contributing to Goal 3 of the current strategy 'Global Awareness of the importance of crop diversity is increased' … The Crop Trust leverages its key assets to increase donor engagement. Strategic use of platforms such as Svalbard has helped raise the Crop Trust's profile and this has been noted internally and externally as a key strength.*"

4. Recommendations

Overall, management agrees with the findings of the review and finds its recommendations constructive and well aligned with the organisation's current priorities. Many of the suggested actions complement initiatives already underway to strengthen operational efficiency, governance, and partnerships. The following table provides management's specific response to each of the 20 recommendations.

	Recommendation	Management Response
	Governance and Management	
1	Develop and implement a structured engagement strategy to enhance the relevance and impact of the Donors' Council Develop a Board Development Plan to strengthen the Executive Board's capacity and diversity for future needs. Suggested actions include: Enhance regional representation on the Board (particularly from underrepresented regions such as Asia and the Middle East) as part of future appointment cycles; Broaden Board expertise in key forward-looking domains such as enterprise-wide risk management, business continuity, digital systems, and emerging technologies, as part of future appointment cycles; Strengthening investment oversight capabilities at the Board level; gaps and training opportunities for Board development i.e. including technology governance, global regulatory compliance, and sustainability considerations, supporting the Board's ability to navigate future challenges confidently.	Management to support actions as decided by the Board.
2	Consider annual governance benchmarking: a) Consider external periodic Board and sub-committee effectiveness reviews b) Ensure performance and learning systems are in place for Board key decisions c) Consider membership of networks such as EFFIO to benefit from information sharing around best practices in relation to Endowment Fund governance and management.	Management to support actions as decided by the Board.
3	Strengthen mechanisms for oversight of outsourced Chief Investment Officer (oCIO), such as the annual performance review process of Mercer. This could include the development of an assessment framework, an assessment report, including documentation of learning and actions taken.	Agree Management will formalize the documentation of the annual oCIO review.
4	Consider investments such as in-person Board retreats, to strengthen effectiveness of the Board.	Management to support actions as decided by the Board.
5	Define clear operational or financial thresholds (such as budget size, staffing levels, or portfolio complexity) that would warrant the establishment of an internal audit function. This will allow the Crop Trust to align its assurance mechanisms with its evolving scale and risk profile in a structured, forward-looking manner.	Agree Management & FRAC currently keep this under review.

Program Impact		
6	Use the remaining four years of the current Strategy to gather information and test assumptions with regard to the Crop Trust's work to support national genebanks, in order to develop a clear ambition for national genebank support from 2030 and a clear understanding of the operating model requirements.	Agree This has been under development since early 2025 and a formal plan will be finalized in 2026.
7	Update 2018 Costing Study.	The Crop Trust will work with the CGIAR to identify the appropriate time to undertake this study and update the costs.
8	Implement a process to review the Endowment Fund Disbursement Strategy. Develop internal policies to support implementation of the Disbursement Strategy, such as how the Disbursement Strategy is applied to national genebanks (e.g. approach to negotiation of co-funding with governments) and Crop Trust's approaches to prioritization of disbursement. Communicate effectively with partners.	This will be part of the national plan (see Recommendation #6).
9	Develop a long-term strategy for system-wide services, including ambition and how it will be delivered, including addressing concerns around sustainability. Within this strategy the Crop Trust could also explore models for greater engagement of international national genebanks (noting considerable effort is already placed on this).	Agree In progress, completion expected in 2026
10	Develop and roll-out a partnership policy, including Crop Trust's approach to partnership (focus on technical partners), categories of partners, partner selection processes, commitments, management framework, accountability mechanisms etc. Within these documents, detail approach and means of engagement of key partners, e.g. working with international genebanks to support national genebanks.	Recommendation will be considered.
11	To address misperceptions, consider implementing a communications campaign targeted particularly at technical partners. A number of the issues highlighted by partners during the review appear to be rooted in misunderstanding/lack of correct information. This campaign should be supported by a suite of policy documents that clearly detail Crop Trust's policy and practice.	Disagree A campaign does not seem appropriate, however, individual, appropriate measures will be considered.

Efficiency and Effectiveness		
12	Develop and implement a strategy execution system that includes organizational KPIs (e.g. a quarterly scorecard & review discussion), reporting cycles (an opportunities to adapt/course correct), strategic allocation of resources and communication to strengthen performance management and staff engagement in organizational priorities. This system would streamline reporting to staff, Executive Board and sub-committees and if so wished, the Crop Trust could publish a quarterly dashboard.	Agree In progress, completion expected in 2026
13	While the 2025 Fundraising Strategy is a great success, it could be developed further to clearly articulate funding goals for Strategic Goal, and how these targets will be reached. More information could be provided within the Strategy in relation to Crop Trust's approach to diversification and the rationale and assumptions underpinning these. In line with the approach to diversification and as each donor type and specific funding mechanisms required different capabilities and management systems, the Crop Trust would benefit from breaking down the Funding Goals by donor type. Performance management of the strategy should be embedded in the strategy execution system as outlined in Recommendation 12.	Agree In progress; further breakdown is contingent on pipeline progress.
14	Consider developing an Annual Endowment Fund Financial Statement/Report (using existing data from Financial Statements) that is easily accessible, to use a tool to promote the Endowment Fund, strengthen transparency for current donors and stakeholders and attract new donors and partners.	Agree This will be considered.
15	Develop a policy to guide the allocation of Endowment Fund income withdrawals, for example: genebank grants: programme support costs: operational costs.	Recommendation will be considered.
16	To strengthen financial management and ensure business continuity, develop financial modelling for the operating model required to achieve Strategic Goal targets. This information will support sustainability as well as ensuring the right funding streams are targeted.	Recommendation will be considered.
17	Ensure that all relevant costs relating to overheads (e.g. the relevant operational costs of partnerships, communications) are allocated as overheads to avoid any distortion of overhead costs.	Agree This is current practice.
18	Review internal resource allocation to assess whether current departmental resourcing aligns with workload, functional complexity, and strategic priorities. In particular, review capacity within the Programmes team relative to its increasing delivery responsibilities, and the support demands that national genebanks require. Within this, examine the long-term sustainability of the Crop Trust's staffing model to evaluate the extent of reliance on short-term consultants and consider alternative workforce models (e.g. long-term contractors in partner regions) that support greater internal capacity, institutional knowledge retention, and geographic reach particularly in regions where the Crop Trust delivers projects.	Agree An analysis will be done and appropriate actions taken.

19	Review communications materials and campaigns to ensure that the essential operations of genebanks are sufficiently represented. Recognizing that donors and the public can more easily relate to results at the food security level (Crop Trust impact indicators), it is important also to showcase the importance of genebanks. Crop Trust could have a specific campaign, have a video portal on the website that shows the work of the genebank, target specific groups, researchers, universities, global education programmes to partner on this promotion.	Agree in principle; communications products are constantly under review and this will continue, as per best practice.
20	It is recognized that the leadership team are focused on strengthening the culture of the organization and an initiative is underway. It is recommended that developing a learning culture is embedded in this initiative and it is also recommended that measurement of this initiative is included in the strategy execution system as noted above, with engagement of staff in the measurement tool.	Agree

Board Response

The Crop Trust's Executive Board welcomes the report from the external review initiated by the Board in 2024. This independent, external review of the organization has been aimed at assessing the current status and providing strategic guidance for the organization related to overall effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and donor confidence.

In the Terms of Reference for the external evaluation the Board stated that the review should provide an independent and thorough evaluation of the Crop Trust's governance, management, programs, investment strategy, operational efficiency, resource mobilization and communications. The review was expected to offer strategic recommendations to possibly enhance the organization's effectiveness and ensure alignment with its mission and goals, thereby guiding the Crop Trust's future trajectory, focusing on governance and management, programmatic work as well as overall effectiveness and efficiency.

The Board thanks the review team for delivering on this task. The Board takes note of the conclusions in the report stating that The Crop Trust is found to be a well-governed, highly effective, resilient, and globally respected organization, demonstrating clear impact in conserving and improving the plant genetic resources for global food security and that the organization has achieved considerable success in recent years in fulfilling this comprehensive Constitutional mandate. The Board has also noted that there is room for improvement and further development of the strategic and managerial running of the Crop Trust.

Based on the findings and recommendations in the review and the response provided by management, the Board has discussed the action points, see the table below.

The Board will follow up on these action points in its 2026 meetings.

	Recommendation	Management Response	Draft Board Responses
	Governance and Management		
1	Develop and implement a structured engagement strategy to enhance the relevance and impact of the Donors' Council Develop a Board Development Plan to strengthen the Executive Board's capacity and diversity for future needs. Suggested actions include: Enhance regional representation on the Board (particularly from underrepresented regions such as Asia and the Middle East) as part of future appointment cycles; Broaden Board expertise in key forward-looking domains such as enterprise-wide risk management, business continuity, digital systems, and emerging technologies, as part of future appointment cycles; Strengthening investment oversight capabilities at the Board level; gaps and training opportunities for Board development i.e. including technology governance, global regulatory compliance, and sustainability considerations, supporting the Board's ability to navigate future challenges confidently.	Management to support actions as decided by the Board.	The Board considers the Donors' Council as a very important element of Crop Trust governance and partnership. The Board leadership will consult with Donors' Council on feasible and desired initiatives in 2026 and report back in Q4 of 2026. The recommendations are welcomed: The respective Board committees (Governance & Nominating Committee on Board composition; Investment; Finance, Risk & Audit) will report back to Executive Board with implementation plans in Q1 of 2026.
2	Consider annual governance benchmarking: a) Consider external periodic Board and sub-committee effectiveness reviews b) Ensure performance and learning systems are in place for Board key decisions c) Consider membership of networks such as EFFIO to benefit from information sharing around best practices in relation to Endowment Fund governance and management.	Management to support actions as decided by the Board.	Welcomed by the Board. Governance & Nominating Committee to present implementation concept in Q1 2026.

3	Strengthen mechanisms for oversight of outsourced Chief Investment Officer (oCIO), such as the annual performance review process of Mercer. This could include the development of an assessment framework, an assessment report, including documentation of learning and actions taken	Agree Management will formalize the documentation of the annual oCIO review.	Welcomed by the Board. The Board Investment Committee will provide oversight and monitor the implementation of this recommendation.
4	Consider investments such as in-person Board retreats, to strengthen effectiveness of the Board.	Management to support actions as decided by the Board.	The Board will consider this in the context of how Board meetings are organized and perhaps schedule an additional day each year for an in-depth discussion of a specific topic.
5	Define clear operational or financial thresholds (such as budget size, staffing levels, or portfolio complexity) that would warrant the establishment of an internal audit function. This will allow the Crop Trust to align its assurance mechanisms with its evolving scale and risk profile in a structured, forward-looking manner.	Agree Management & FRAC currently keep this under review.	The Board will determine a time schedule for reporting back by management on this recommendation.
Program Impact			
6	Use the remaining four years of the current Strategy to gather information and test assumptions with regard to the Crop Trust's work to support national genebanks, in order to develop a clear ambition for national genebank support from 2030 and a clear understanding of the operating model requirements.	Agree This has been under development since early 2025 and a formal plan will be finalized in 2026.	The Board will engage in the monitoring of the implementation in Q4, 2026 and thereafter on an annual basis.
7	Update 2018 Costing Study.	The Crop Trust will work with the CGIAR to identify the appropriate time to undertake this study and update the costs.	The Board shall be informed about the update in Q4 of 2027.

8	Implement a process to review the Endowment Fund Disbursement Strategy. Develop internal policies to support implementation of the Disbursement Strategy, such as how the Disbursement Strategy is applied to national genebanks (e.g. approach to negotiation of co-funding with governments) and Crop Trust's approaches to prioritization of disbursement. Communicate effectively with partners.	This will be part of the national plan (see Recommendation #6).	The Board will be informed about progress of the implementation of the review in Q4 2026.
9	Develop a long-term strategy for system-wide services, including ambition and how it will be delivered, including addressing concerns around sustainability. Within this strategy the Crop Trust could also explore models for greater engagement of international national genebanks (noting considerable effort is already placed on this).	Agree In progress, completion expected in 2026.	Management will report to the Board in Q4 2026.
10	Develop and roll-out a partnership policy, including Crop Trust's approach to partnership (focus on technical partners), categories of partners, partner selection processes, commitments, management framework, accountability mechanisms etc. Within these documents, detail approach and means of engagement of key partners, e.g. working with international genebanks to support national genebanks.	Recommendation will be considered.	The Board welcomes this recommendation and considers it as an update and clarification of existing partnership arrangements. A progress report to the Board in Q4 2026 is expected.
11	To address misperceptions, consider implementing a communications campaign targeted particularly at technical partners. A number of the issues highlighted by partners during the review appear to be rooted in misunderstanding/lack of correct information. This campaign should be supported by a suite of policy documents that clearly detail Crop Trust's policy and practice.	Disagree A campaign does not seem appropriate, however, individual, appropriate measures will be considered.	The Board shall be briefed in Q1 2026 about main elements of communications activities by management. Rather than many written briefs or campaign actions the Board advises to explore consultations with stakeholders and partners, and to seek an opportunity for consultations with the related CGIAR representatives soon, and report back to the Board about it.

Efficiency and Effectiveness			
12	Develop and implement a strategy execution system that includes organizational KPIs (e.g. a quarterly scorecard & review discussion), reporting cycles (an opportunities to adapt/course correct), strategic allocation of resources and communication to strengthen performance management and staff engagement in organizational priorities. This system would streamline reporting to staff, Executive Board and sub- committees and if so wished, the Crop Trust could publish a quarterly dashboard.	Agree In progress, completion expected in 2026.	The Board sub-committees and the Board shall be briefed about related progress in Q4 2026.
13	While the 2025 Fundraising Strategy is a great success, it could be developed further to clearly articulate funding goals for Strategic Goal, and how these targets will be reached. More information could be provided within the Strategy in relation to Crop Trust's approach to diversification and the rationale and assumptions underpinning these. In line with the approach to diversification and as each donor type and specific funding mechanisms required different capabilities and management systems, the Crop Trust would benefit from breaking down the Funding Goals by donor type. Performance management of the strategy should be embedded in the strategy execution system as outlined in Recommendation 12.	Agree In progress; further breakdown is contingent on pipeline progress.	The Board notes a changed context of donor environment in recent years at global level. The Board envisions to engage with management in designing actions in the context of the existing Fundraising Strategy and possibly new elements.
14	Consider developing an Annual Endowment Fund Financial Statement/Report (using existing data from Financial Statements) that is easily accessible, to use a tool to promote the Endowment Fund, strengthen transparency for current donors and stakeholders and attract new donors and partners.	Agree This will be considered.	To be explored by management in consultation with the Board Investment Committee.

15	Develop a policy to guide the allocation of Endowment Fund income withdrawals, for example: genebank grants: programme support costs: operational costs.	Recommendation will be considered.	The Board asks for an initial briefing in the Finance, Risk and Audit Committee on guidelines in Q1 2026.
16	To strengthen financial management and ensure business continuity, develop financial modelling for the operating model required to achieve Strategic Goal targets. This information will support sustainability as well as ensuring the right funding streams are targeted.	Recommendation will be considered.	To be addressed in the Finance, Risk and Audit Committee with management.
17	Ensure that all relevant costs relating to overheads (e.g. the relevant operational costs of partnerships, communications) are allocated as overheads to avoid any distortion of overhead costs.	Agree This is current practice.	To be addressed in the Finance, Risk and Audit Committee with management.
18	Review internal resource allocation to assess whether current departmental resourcing aligns with workload, functional complexity, and strategic priorities. In particular, review capacity within the Programmes team relative to its increasing delivery responsibilities, and the support demands that national genebanks require. Within this, examine the long- term sustainability of the Crop Trust's staffing model to evaluate the extent of reliance on short-term consultants and consider alternative workforce models (e.g. long-term contractors in partner regions) that support greater internal capacity, institutional knowledge retention, and geographic reach particularly in regions where the Crop Trust delivers projects.	Agree An analysis will be done and appropriate actions taken.	The Board considers this a management matter.
19	Review communications materials and campaigns to ensure that the essential operations of genebanks are sufficiently represented. Recognizing that donors and the public can more easily relate to results at the food security level (Crop Trust impact indicators), it is important also to showcase the importance of genebanks. Crop Trust could have a specific campaign, have a video portal on the website that shows the work of the genebank, target specific groups, researchers, universities, global education programmes to partner on this promotion.	Agree in principle; communications products are constantly under review and this will continue, as per best practice.	The Board welcomes this and considers it a management matter.

20	It is recognized that the leadership team are focused on strengthening the culture of the organization and an initiative is underway. It is recommended that developing a learning culture is embedded in this initiative and it is also recommended that measurement of this initiative is included in the strategy execution system as noted above, with engagement of staff in the measurement tool.	Agree	The Board welcomes this and considers this a management matter.

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