

Frequently Asked Questions about the Wheat Class System

What is the Canadian Grain Commission?

The CGC is the federal government agency that regulates grain handling in Canada and certifies the quality, safety and quantity of export shipments of Canadian grain. It delivers grain quality assurance programs and oversees quantity assurance at export; carries out scientific research to understand all aspects of grain quality and grain safety and to support the grain grading system; and protects the rights of Canadian grain producers when they deliver their grain to licensed grain handling companies and grain dealers. Its programs and services support a competitive, efficient grain sector and uphold Canada's international reputation for consistent and reliable grain quality.

The CGC's legislated mandate is "to work in the interests of grain producers. Guided by the *Canada Grain Act*, the CGC works to establish and maintain standards of quality for Canadian grain, regulate grain handling in Canada, and to ensure that grain is a dependable commodity for domestic and export markets."

What are wheat classes?

Registered Canadian wheat varieties are assigned to one of the ten Eastern or nine Western milling wheat classes based on functional characteristics relevant for end-users such as millers, bakers and food processors. For example, Canada Eastern Soft Red Winter (CESRW) includes soft red winter wheat varieties grown in Eastern Canada that are low protein and used for cakes, pastry, cereal, crackers, biscuits and filling; Canada Western Amber Durum (CWAD) includes varieties of durum wheat grown in the West that have a high yield of semolina, excellent pasta-making quality and are used for pasta-making and couscous. See <http://bit.ly/2qGxfdM> for the complete list of classes.

Why are wheat classes used?

Wheat is a very complex grain with a wide range of potential qualities and uses. Canada's wheat class system provides a way to ensure the varieties grown and sold as a bulk commodity meet minimum standards and perform well for a buyer's intended use. This allows our wheat to be marketed with reliability and consistency according to the ways our customers use wheat. The wheat class system increases the value of our commodity and makes it possible for Canadian wheat to sell at higher prices.

How are varieties assigned to classes?

When a new wheat variety is being proposed, it needs to be registered and allocated to a class. The relevant Western or Eastern Recommending Committee assesses the variety's quality, disease resistance and agronomic performance, as well as its value for use in the intended wheat class by reviewing data from two or three years of field trials held at several different locations within the growing area. If the variety meets the necessary criteria, the Recommending Committee recommends that the CFIA register the variety for sale in Canada, or in a region of Canada if the variety had a high risk of causing harm due to disease or inferior end use characteristics when grown under conditions that prevail outside of the recommended region. If an unregistered variety is sold into Canada's bulk commodity system it must be graded as "sample" which has the lowest price. This discourages farmers from growing unregistered varieties and thereby protects our commodity system from disease and quality problems due to inferior varieties.

What does "merit" mean?

A variety is said to have merit if it is as good as or better than the "check variety" for the crop in terms of required characteristics such as disease resistance, quality and agronomic performance defined in the regulations for its intended class. Merit requirements mean that the wheat class's value to farmers and end-users is maintained or improved as new varieties are introduced.

How is grain graded?

Within each wheat class (with a few exceptions, such as feed) there are grades that further refine parameters related to the characteristics that affect performance or quality for the end-user. The price farmers get for the grain delivered and the price customers pay for it is based on the grain's grade. The CGC publishes an official *Grain Grading Guide* every year to provide grain inspectors with a complete reference on the grading of grains, oilseeds and pulses.

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What about heritage varieties?

It is legal to grow unregistered heritage varieties. They are usually sold into premium specialty markets such as artisanal bakeries. This occurs independently of the CGC system. Some heritage varieties, such as Red Fife, are “land races” and thus not eligible to be registered due to their within-variety genetic variability.

Can Canadian farmers sell grain without using CGC grading?

Yes. Farmers may sell to buyers based on contract specifications instead of CGC class and grade if they wish.

How does the CGC wheat class and grading system help farmers?

The CGC's *Grain Grading Guide* provides a transparent and independent reference to establish whether a given load meets the grade's requirements. If a farmer disagrees with the elevator's grade and dockage when delivering grain, he or she has the right to ask for a

representative sample to be sent to the CGC and assessed by a CGC inspector. Payment will be subject to the inspector's grade and dockage. This means the farmer has the weight of the CGC behind him or her when facing the grain company. Without our grading system, each farmer would be on their own in disputes as to whether their grain meets specifications set out in their individual contracts. Farmers do not have access to sophisticated laboratory equipment and other tools needed to measure all the indicators needed to prove they've met the terms of their contract. Weather and other factors mean harvest may not turn out as expected. If the harvest does not meet the contract's specifications, the farmer is at the mercy of the grain company to take whatever price they offer.

The wheat class and grading system also prevents quality or disease issues from damaging our international reputation. The consistency of product within Canada's wheat classes provides the foundation for higher prices on the export market. The better price we get by delivering high quality allows grain farming in Canada to be viable in spite of our distances from port and the need to cover higher transportation costs compared with farmers in other exporting countries.