

# Fact Sheet:

## Variety Registration in Canada

This fact sheet will help you understand a key component of our seed system: **Variety Registration**.

Variety Registration is based on Canada's seed regulations which have protected farmers for nearly 100 years. But this could soon change – and not necessarily for the benefit of farmers. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency is currently leading a Seed Regulatory Modernization process that could bring in major changes to our system.



Canadian farmers buying seed can be confident that registered varieties perform well in our growing conditions, do not harbor serious plant diseases, and will produce crops our customers value all because they are independently assessed by experts. We know the variety's characteristics, such as days to maturity, yield, disease resistance, height and other data relevant to the crop, are verified through independent testing with published results.

### What is Variety Registration?

Our commercial field crops (cereals, oilseeds, pulses, forages) – with the exception of corn – must be registered varieties. Horticultural seed (vegetables) must be graded to ensure it meets germination standards, or be properly labelled to provide buyers with information about the seller and the seed.

Canada's Variety Registration system requires new varieties to be tested to ensure that they consistently meet standards farmers depend on before they can be sold. The Seeds Regulations set out the legal framework for variety registration, including what types of crops require new varieties to be registered and the minimum standards for achieving registration. The system is based on unbiased, peer reviewed merit testing for agronomic and quality traits as demonstrated by multiyear field tests in locations across the growing region. Variety Registration helps farmers and our customers, both domestic and international, have confidence in the Canadian agriculture system. Our Variety Registration system provides assurance that varieties will perform as advertised throughout the food value chain.

### Why is Variety Registration needed?

By selecting and saving seed over generations, farmers and Indigenous peoples have bred countless varieties that created the agricultural diversity we benefit from today. Farmers have historically saved most of the seed they use, occasionally buying seed to maintain good seed quality and take advantage of new varieties.

Many seed qualities cannot be easily seen, so a coordinated system of documenting and testing is needed. Separating the testing and documenting process from the business of selling seed protects farmers and the whole agriculture system from misrepresentation and fraud. Government seed regulations and public institutions provide public oversight and transparent, easily-comparable performance information.

Canada's Variety Registration regulations involve collaboration between independent peer-review Recommending Committees (RC), the Canadian Grain Commission (CGC), and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA). For most crops, new varieties must demonstrate "merit" – they must be as-good-as or better-than similar varieties and pose no harm to farmers or the food system – in order to qualify for registration.

For some crops, merit is not required for registration, but information describing the new variety in detail must be provided.

When farmers buy a Registered Variety, they know the seed has gone through all these steps:

1. The plant breeder applied to enter the proposed variety into registration trials by submitting relevant Canadian data.
2. The RC coordinated pre-registration field trials in a range of growing conditions over a specified number of years to produce comparable performance, disease, and quality data
3. The RC reviewed the data to see if the proposed variety showed merit in agronomic performance, disease resistance, and end-quality characteristics (also reviewed by the CGC).
4. The RC members voted to recommend the variety for registration based on its merit considerations.
5. The CFIA's Variety Registration Office agreed with the RC and registered the variety.

Informed farmers rely on and value the security and consistency that our Variety Registration system ensures. Variety Registration protects our fields and crops from plant disease outbreaks. It also contributes to Canada's international reputation because the Variety Registration process is a key factor in our ability to produce consistent, high quality export crops.

Variety Registration provides accurate, useful, and unbiased information not influenced by the seed seller's marketing goals. Seed is a highly concentrated global business. In 2022 the four largest seed companies controlled 58% of the world's seed market. The top two companies, Bayer and Corteva, control 40% of the seed market. This degree of concentration allows the top seed companies to exert tremendous power over markets – and to lobby governments to change regulations to suit their businesses. Like all corporations, seed companies aim to maximize profits for their shareholders – it is not their job to protect farmer livelihoods and steward agricultural biodiversity.

Seed companies are lobbying to weaken the Variety Registration system - or get rid of it altogether! Without a robust, transparent, and independent variety registration system farmers would face a “buyer beware” situation. Seed companies would no longer have to meet the standards for quality and performance, and farmers would have to make their seed choices without the benefit of unbiased comparable data about variety characteristics, performance in Canadian growing conditions, or disease risks. Our transparent, trustworthy, reliable system ensures farmers can make informed choices about the seed we buy.

The CFIA's Seed Regulatory Modernization process will have several opportunities for farmers to make their views known. Let's make sure that they know we need a Variety Registration system intact and working for farmers.

### Questions?

Please do not hesitate to reach out for more information about Canada's seed regulations.

Visit <https://www.nfu.ca/campaigns/save-our-seed/> or email [nfu@nfu.ca](mailto:nfu@nfu.ca) with “Seed Regulations” in the subject line.

