

Fact Sheet: Seed Grade Tables

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

Seed Grade Tables are part of Canada's Seed Regulations, which have protected farmers for nearly 100 years. But this could soon change – the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) is currently leading a Seed Regulatory Modernization process that could bring in major changes to our system. We need to make sure that the Seeds Regulations continue to protect farmers and the public interest.



Canadian farmers buying pedigreed seed can be confident the seed's grade is the result of an official third-party verification process authorized by the CFIA. The seed lot's official Grade is printed on the blue tag attached to each bag of seed, and guarantees that the seed meets minimum standards for purity and germination.

What are the Grade Tables?

The Grade Tables set out minimum standards for the presence of weed seeds, presence of seed from other crops, presence of other contaminants relevant to the crop, and germination rates.

Canada's Seeds Regulations include a series of Grade Tables that set out standards for all major field crops and field crop mixtures of pedigreed seed sold in Canada. All pedigreed seed must be graded before it can be sold. Seed that is pedigreed can be traced back to the original breeder through an official paper trail overseen by the CFIA. Corn seed is not included in Canada's pedigreed seed system, but in order to be given an official grade it must be tested by a government-approved seed lab.

Imported seed can only be given a Canadian grade if it meets our regulation's grading requirements. It is illegal to put a grade name on a seed package if it has not been graded according to the regulations.

When farmers sell non-pedigreed seed they have grown to another farmer, they are not required to label or grade it as long as they do not advertise the seed for sale.

How do the Grade Tables work?

Grade tables include standards for each level of pedigreed seed. For example, the grades available for pedigreed wheat seed are Canada Foundation No. 1 and No. 2, Canada Registered No. 1 and No. 2, Canada Certified No. 1 and No. 2, and Common No. 1 and No. 2 – a total of eight grades. Canada Foundation No. 1 has the highest purity standards and would primarily be purchased by certified seed growers to be multiplied and sold to commercial farmers. Commercial farmers would buy Canada Certified or Common seed grades for crop production.

Canada Certified No. 1 wheat seed cannot have any noxious weed seeds, and per kilogram cannot have more than three weed seeds, one barley, rye or triticale seeds, five seeds of other non-wheat crop seeds, five durum seeds, and two ergot bodies. Its germination rate must be at least 85 percent.

Canada Common No. 2 is the lowest grade on the Wheat Grade Table. It allows a maximum of six noxious weed seeds, and twenty weed seeds in total per kilogram. It can have no more than twenty barley, rye or triticale seeds, twenty seeds of other non-wheat crop seeds, twenty-four durum seeds, and eight ergot bodies. Its germination rate must be at least 70 percent.

All grades include minimum germination rates and maximum number of weed seeds (for most grades no noxious weed seeds are allowed) and seeds of other crops. Grades reflect the relevant quality issues for each crop - for example, the grade tables for brassicas like mustard and canola have maximum allowed sclerotinia bodies per 50 grams. To see all of the grade tables go to the Seeds Regulations, Schedule I at https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/regulations/C.R.C.,_c._1400/page-14.html#h-511905

Why are the Grade Tables important?

Canada's Seed Regulations ensure that when farmers purchase seed that has an official grade they can be confident that it meets the quality standard associated with the grade name, and that they can easily look up the relevant grade tables to find out the specifications for the grade. Grade standards are upheld by the federal government and grading is done by a CFIA-licensed inspector.

Seed grades are easy to understand, simple to compare, and controlled by public institutions not involved in selling seed. The rules and standards over the use of seed grades are enforced by the CFIA ensuring public oversight for minimum seed quality standards in Canada.

Seed grades protect farmers by ensuring they will not be sowing unwanted weeds, other crop kinds or in some cases, disease, when they plant their crops. By guaranteeing germination rates farmers can be confident when deciding how much seed to buy for their seeding plans. Our transparent, trustworthy, reliable and convenient system ensures farmers can quickly and easily make informed choices about the seed we buy.

Seed companies are lobbying to eliminate Grade Tables from our regulations. Instead, they propose including information about purity and germination on the package or bag – without the need to meet any minimum standard. Without a robust, transparent, and enforceable seed grading system farmers would face a “buyer beware” situation. Farmers would have to read each seed bag tag before buying to assess whether it would harm their farm if planted.

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 to keep our seed grading system working for farmers in Canada.

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 with “Seed Regulations” in the subject line.

