

Speak up for seed!

Canada's Seed Regulations have created a strong foundation for our food system in the public interest. The Seed Regulations were designed to protect farmers from unscrupulous seed dealers, and from fraud and misrepresentation within the seed system. They ensure the value of our agricultural products for farmers and end-users with evidence-based and transparent processes for registering new varieties, certifying seeds, and updating regulations.



The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) is currently leading a Seed Regulatory Modernization (SRM) process to review our Seed Regulations.

The process could bring in major changes – and not necessarily for the benefit of farmers. Global seed, biotech, and chemical corporations are lobbying for amendments that would benefit them at the expense of farmers and the public interest.

The National Farmers Union (NFU) wants to make sure you have the information you need to engage with this process. We've prepared this short summary of the SRM process, what's at stake, and how you can act to keep seed in farmers' hands.

In February 2019, a Seed Regulatory Modernization Working Group (SRMWG) was appointed to review and suggest amendments to the Seed Regulations. This is a 14-member committee, led by the CFIA, with representatives from the seed industry, producer groups, commodity associations, public plant breeders, and two non-government organizations. The SRM process also involves several Task Teams that delve into more technical details and report back to the SRMWG with recommendations on certain topics. Below, we provide background on some of these topics: variety registration, seed grade tables, and incorporation by reference.

Variety Registration

Our variety registration system requires new varieties to be tested to ensure that they consistently meet standards farmers depend on before they can be sold. With this 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. Separating the testing and documenting process from the business of selling seed protects farmers and the whole agriculture system from misrepresentation and fraud.

Seed companies in the SRM process are lobbying to weaken or even remove our national variety registration system. Farmers would lose access to the unbiased and independent data that they need to make crucial decisions on seed purchases. They would have to get their information from seed companies intent on maximizing profits, which is an unacceptable conflict of interest.

Grade Tables

The Seeds Regulations include a series of grade tables that 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 for all major field crops and field crop mixtures of pedigreed seed sold in Canada.

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.

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 of seed quality standards in Canada.

Incorporation by Reference

Incorporation by reference [IBR] is a new regulatory strategy where, instead of putting the wording of a rule in the text of a regulation, the regulation simply “refers” to another document. These documents are created outside Canada's usual processes for developing regulations. They can also be changed without consulting with, or even informing, farmers and the general public. Thus, IBR reduces the transparency of our regulatory system and holds the risk that the corporate seed sector will have undue influence over making the rules. Global seed, biotech, and chemical corporations want regulators to use IBR for all seed certification requirements.

Seed is a fundamental element of agriculture, and changes to how seed is governed have wide-reaching and long-lasting impacts. We need to continue using the Canada Gazette regulatory amendment process, which prioritizes transparency and accountability for farmers over speed and convenience for corporations.

Why this matters

The Seed Regulatory Modernization review puts all of the pillars of our seed system on the table — and the outcome could bring in major changes that harm the public interest, weaken agriculture in Canada, and make seed less reliable and more expensive for farmers. The SRM process should instead serve to further support farmers and strengthen our seed system.

The CFIA is seeking input from farmers and others in the seed sector to inform their recommendations for the future of our seed system. The NFU has carefully analyzed the CFIA's questions and is offering you a Farmers Guide to allow you to easily complete the survey with answers that will support farmers' interests ([click here for a PDF of the Farmers Guide](#) or [here for an HTML version](#)). You can add your voice by [clicking here to fill in the CFIA survey](#) before the end of April, as the survey closes May 1.

The NFU has produced a series of fact sheets that provide more detail on key pillars of our seed system. To find those and other information, [visit our website](#). If you have any questions, you can email nfu@nfu.ca with “Seed Regulations” in the subject line.

