

# Save your access to the seed you need!



During winter and spring 2024, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) is continuing its 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 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.

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 also provide guidelines for importing seed, and they allow for farmer choice and access to seed. The Seed Regulations 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.

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 look 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 import and export, and common seed.

## **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 can cancel seed varieties on request where there are no safety concerns – but the SRM is considering disallowing these cancellations. Cancellations on request reduce seed diversity, force farmers to buy newer varieties that have royalties attached, and remove varieties that have unique economic, cultural, or agronomic value. The ability for seed corporations to cancel varieties gives them an outsize amount of power.

## Seed Import and Export

Canada's seed import rules ensure that imported seed conforms with Canada's variety registration rules, and that diseases and noxious weeds do not enter the country via seed shipments. These rules prevent harm to our agricultural system. Canada relies heavily on imported seed for the horticulture sector as well as for corn, canola and soy production. Some proposals in the Seed Regulatory Modernization process, however, would place undue restrictions on seed imports of small lots that are an important source of seed for small-scale and organic growers seeking diverse sources of seed, especially for culturally significant seeds that would otherwise be inaccessible in Canada.

## Common Seed

Both pedigreed and common seed are supported by Canada's Seed Regulations. The parentage of pedigreed seed has been documented and can be traced back through several generations. Pedigreed seed is produced and certified according to clear rules by farmers who are members of the Canadian Seed Growers Association (CSGA).

The term "common seed" is used in two ways – as a description (common seed) and as a grade (Common Seed). Using common seed allows farmers to keep older varieties in circulation and to obtain seed for lower prices and fewer restrictions compared with seed that is subject to Plant Breeders Rights. Access to common seed is particularly valuable for organic farmers as many of the older varieties were developed when crops were grown with fewer inputs. The common seed supply also ensures there is enough seed available especially in the event of a year with widespread poor growing conditions that result in a lower yield of certified seed.

Some proposals in the 2024 Seed Regulatory Modernization survey threaten access to the common seed by reducing farmer choice in seed by imposing expensive and onerous requirements on sellers of common seed. This would limit farmer-to-farmer seed trade, reduce biodiversity, and blur the distinction between certified and common seed.

## 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, reduce farmers' choice of seed, 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 once again 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](#) ).

**You can add your voice by filling in the CFIA survey by 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](mailto:nfu@nfu.ca) with "Seed Regulations" in the subject line.

