

Certified Seed

The seed certification system is designed to preserve the genetic purity and identity of a plant variety. The program is overseen on a state-by-state basis, with each state having a seed certifying division. Most of these divisions are members of the Association of Official Seed Certifying Agencies (AOSCA) and follow their standardized rules.

The certification process ensures that seed is produced, harvested, cleaned, and tested under strict guidelines, which include the following:

Special Land Requirements:

The land must be free from noxious and restricted weeds. It cannot have been previously planted with another variety or class of seed that could cross-pollinate. The required rest period depends on how long the previous crop's seed or roots remain viable. Additionally, the field must be isolated from other fields with compatible species.

Planting Eligible Crops:

Each state's certifying agency governs eligible crops. Generally, a crop is eligible if approved by one of the following:

- Plant Variety Protection Office
- National Certified Variety Review Board (AOSCA)
- AOSCA member agency
- Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)

The crop must also be noninvasive in the region. Species on the state's noxious weed list are not eligible.

Field Inspections:

State inspectors check that fields are clean, healthy, and free of issues like weeds, poor stand development, disease, or insect damage.

Harvesting:

Certified seed must be harvested using equipment that is clean and free from contamination by other crop or weed seeds.

Conditioning:

Seed must be cleaned in a certified facility approved by the state's certifying agency. The goal is to preserve isolation and quality.

Seed Sampling and Testing:

Seed samples are typically drawn under state supervision and tested in official seed labs. If the seed meets mechanical purity and germination standards, it is eligible for certification.

Breeder Seed (White tag):

First-generation seed, directly controlled by the entity that released the variety.

Foundation Seed (White tag):

Produced from Breeder seed; typically second-generation. May also come from other Foundation seed if Breeder seed is unavailable.

Registered Seed (Purple tag):

Produced from Foundation seed and usually considered third-generation.

Certified Seed (Blue tag):

Produced from Registered or Foundation seed. Typically fourth-generation and used for commercial planting. It is not eligible for re-certification.

Substandard Certified Seed (Blue tag):

Seed that went through certification but failed mechanical purity or germination standards. May be approved on a case-by-case basis.

Source Identified Seed (Yellow tag):

Harvested from natural stands or field production. Not trait-tested but eligible if it meets state requirements.

Selected Class Seed (Green tag):

Material that resembles a variety but lacks proven heritable traits. May be field-grown or naturally harvested while under evaluation.