

California Seed Association Fact Sheet Series



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What is certified seed?

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Certified seed is the product of a voluntary quality assurance program for the maintenance and increase of agronomic and vegetable crop seed.

Background

The California Crop Improvement Association (CCIA) is the official seed certifying agency in California as recognized by California Seed Law. Each variety that is entered into this program has been evaluated for its unique characteristics such as pest resistance, adaptability, uniformity, quality, and yield. Seed production is closely monitored by the CCIA to maintain genetic purity and prevent weed, other crop and disease contamination that may negatively affect seed quality. Field inspections are coordinated during periods when distinct crop morphological characteristics, diseases and other important criteria are most noticeable. Field inspectors also look for weeds producing seed that may be virtually indistinguishable in appearance from crop seed. Certification genetic purity standards are well-defined because when purity is compromised, insect and disease resistance, crop quality and uniformity can be reduced.

An additional seed quality characteristic that is monitored in certification is germination, with minimum requirements for certified seed ranging from 80-90% depending on crop species. Seed movement is monitored by the CCIA from field harvest, through the conditioning plant, and in the bag. Seed samples are taken at the time of conditioning and are closely examined in the seed laboratory. Seed must meet minimum germination and purity standards. Purity is tested not only for inert, weed and other crop seed, but also for its true-to-type nature. Seed morphological characteristics are noted in variety description files and seed appearance is checked against what the breeder has described. Samples can be rejected if "off-type" seeds are found at a percentage that is greater than standards permit.

In addition, when the United States became a participant in the international seed certification scheme administered by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the CCIA became the designated authority to conduct the OECD program in California. The OECD is responsible for administering the seed certification program in 24 member countries and 16 non-member countries that participate in the scheme. All cereal, herbage and oil, and maize and sorghum seed exported to European Union countries must be produced under OECD guidelines.

The CCIA is also a member of the Association of Official Seed Certifying Agencies (AOSCA). The AOSCA mission is to promote and facilitate the movement of seed or plant products in local, national, and international markets through the coordinated efforts of official seed certification agencies acting to evaluate, document, and verify that a seed or plant product meets certain accepted standards. It was established in 1919 as the International Crop Improvement Association and now has a number of international member countries located in North and South America, Australia and New Zealand.

More Information

California Crop Improvement Association (<http://ccia.ucdavis.edu>)

Association of Official Seed Certifying Agencies (<http://aosca.org>)

California Department of Food & Agriculture (<http://www.cdffa.ca.gov>)

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