

**2017 ACORN Conference & Trade Show
Best Western Glengarry - Truro, NS**

Workshop Title:

Canada's Seed Regulations: What do Vegetable Seed Producers Need to Know

Speakers:

Mel Sylvestre

Executive Summary:

Mel gives an overview of what it is like being a vegetable seed producer in Canada and the process a producer needs to follow. Vegetable seed regulations, how they need to be refined, and who does the regulating are explained. Mel describes labelling, grading, and verifying vegetable seeds and goes into detail on germination testing.

Detailed Notes:

Mel's Background:

Mel is a French Canadian from Montreal, Quebec. She moved to British Columbia where she studied at the University of British Columbia (UBC). After she graduated, she decided to stay in British Columbia where she has spent the last 12 years. Mel is fascinated by policy and regulation.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) is responsible for seed regulation in Canada. In Canada, the Seed Act and the Seed Regulations are the two main documents that seed producers are required to follow. These documents mostly define the regulations for grain seeds. Vegetable seeds are exempt from certain regulations. At first glance, these documents seem intense and difficult to understand. However, this is because grain seed requires stringent regulations and is why a lot of the regulations exempt vegetable seed. Mel will be focusing her lecture on the vegetable seed portion today in order to help seed producers understand the Seed Act and Seed Regulations in Canada.

Seed Act and Seed Regulations:

- These are the conditions for which one can sell seeds in Canada. However, these conditions are exempt for vegetable seed.
- Both vegetable roots and herbs are exempt.
- Every seed in Canada needs to be graded (Again, vegetables and herbs are exempt).
- Minimum weed seed: vegetables should follow standards.
- Vegetables are only 2-3 pages of the Seed Act

Labelling seeds:

It is required that the business, address, and species be on the seed packet. Consumers appreciate more information on the label, however business is not required to do so. Days to maturity is not required. There is debate that other information should be required on the label and this will be mentioned later on in the lecture and conversation.

Grading:

Canada #1 and Canada #2 are the two grading systems in Canada. Canada #2 is not commonly used because #2 sounds second compared to #1, even though they are just two different grading systems and one is not inferior to the other. The grading system that the seed producer is following is required to be advertised on the packet. The year that the seed is tested OR was packaged is required to be on the packet. Germination rate and purity (weed seed count) are the two things that seed grade is based on.

Germination:

Germination rate (germ rate) is the percentage of seeds that will produce a plant (the count of how many seeds out of 100 seeds will the germ of the seed exit the seed coat). A seed producer does not need to declare 85% germination (which would be the exact tested germ rate), but they can instead say that their seed is 80% guaranteed, which would be the minimum germ rate. The seed producers themselves are the ones who do the germination test and report the results. When doing the germination tests, seed producers need to follow seed count rates that are listed and follow the directions on how each seed should be germinated for the count (example: pre-soak the seeds, certain soil temperatures) and which days to count the number of seeds that have germinated (example: day 3, day 10. Since the time it takes for a seed to germinate once it is planted is variable, depending on the seed).

Verification:

3rd party verification: seed producers that are assessing their seed for germination rate (self-reporting). 3rd party verification is currently the only type of vegetable seed verification in Canada. For vegetable seed producers, an inspector from the CFIA might stop by every 10 years to make sure a seed farmer is following the regulations. This is because vegetable seed farming is such a small industry, which is why CFIA does not check often. An inspector may stop by a vegetable seed farm if a customer reports that the vegetable seed they had purchased does not meet the standards listed on the seed packet.

Reporting:

A seed farmer should keep track of their seed analysis (example: keeping track of records on Excel) for reference and can follow "CFIA's Canadian methods and procedures for seed testing". However, seed farmers can use their own method for testing but this methodology should be recorded. This is important in case an inspector shows up and requests to look at your records. It is also good to keep records on how you have tested your seeds in order to keep a consistent product. Example: If you have

a customer that consistently buys your seed and they know that when your product label states an 80% minimum germ rate, that they actually get 90%, they will sow their seeds based on this. Changing your methods may affect the germ rate you state on your seed packet; the customer may not know this and sow their seeds as they usually do, but may not see the same results. Customers appreciate consistency.

Summary:

There are methods for accurately sampling seed lots, which should be explored and chosen based on the farm type. A germination test should be comprised of 200 seeds, as stated by the CFIA.

The CFIA Canada #1 grading system status for seed farmers is not enforced by CFIA or any enforcement body. CFIA Canada #1 is a regulation. If there is a complaint filed, CFIA will intervene. Canada #1 requires seeds to be at a germination minimum of 80%.

Purity does not include potential pathogens or testing for pathogens. Purity currently only involves weed seed count. Weed seeds can be present in vegetable seeds because when the vegetable seeds are harvested on a larger scale, the tools that are used to collect the seeds can mistake weed seeds for vegetable seeds if they are of similar size.

Canada vegetable seed regulation, as it is right now, should be taken with a grain of salt as there is not much detail.

Organic and GM (genetically modified) free standards for vegetable seed farmers in Canada is possible as there is a logo and a seed farmer can become verified. Organic vegetable farmers that are certified organic can put that logo on their seed packets. Seeds that also double as a food source have to instead follow Canada's food safety act.