USDA Seed Regulatory and Testing Division Summer 2026



ITEMS OF INTEREST IN SEED

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RECENT ACTIVITIES

SRTD HOSTED TRAINING ON TZ TESTING

On July 22-23, Seed Regulatory and Testing Division (SRTD) botanist Beth Stewart conducted a training session on tetrazolium testing for the USDA Agricultural Research Service, focusing on cutting, staining, and evaluating techniques of both native and cultivated seeds. These trainings strengthen consistency and uniformity across seed testing laboratories.

OECD UPDATE FOR OREGON SEED CONTROL OFFICIALS

On August 26, Dr. Steve Malone, U.S. OECD Seed Scheme program manager, was the featured speaker for the Oregon Seed Association's monthly Lunch & Learn series. The "OECD Seed Schemes 101" presentation focused on the importance of the OECD Seed Schemes for the international movement of seed, how the program is an extension of the process and procedures of State seed certifying agencies, and tips to avoid seed shipments postponed or denied entry by customs officials in other countries.

THE 1ST AOSA-SCST ANNUAL MEETING

AOSA-SCST held its first Annual Meeting June 6-11, 2026, marking a historic milestone in the long-standing collaborative efforts between the two organizations. This merger reflects a strong foundation of mutual trust, shared values, and a unified commitment to supporting the seed industry through scientific integrity and cooperation. SRTD looks forward to continued partnership in upholding the excellence of the American seed trade.

Lan Chi Trinh, Regulatory Manager, represented SRTD at the affiliate meeting and provided updates on division activities. As Rules Committee Chair, she led the discussion on new rule proposals. Ten proposals were submitted and seven were advanced for membership voting. These seven proposals were passed during the in-person vote at the annual meeting and will be adopted on October 1, 2026. For details on rule updates, refer to the chart on page 6.

The 2027 AOSA-SCST Annual Meeting will be held in Nashville, Tennessee, June 6-10, 2027.

For more information regarding this article, contact Regulatory Manager Lan Chi Trinh at (704) 810-7272; lan-chin.trinh@usda.gov.

ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN SEED CONTROL OFFICIALS ANNUAL MEETING

The Association of American Seed Control Officials (AASCO) held its 40th Annual Meeting July 13–16, 2026, in Minneapolis, MN. There were 50 attendees including Seed Control Officials from 17 States and representatives of American Seed Trade Association (ASTA) and AOSA-SCST.

Deputy Administrator Ruihong Guo and Regulatory Manager Lan Chi Trinh represented SRTD and presented updates on the division's activities, Federal Seed Act enforcement, and seed labeling that prompted a productive discussion.

Other meeting topics included noxious-weed seed matters, variety development, native seed issues, expired grass seed at retail locations, relabeling limits, low-germination vegetable seed enforcement, and hermetically sealed food plot seed regulation.

Participants also expressed interest in updating the AASCO Seed Sampling Handbook to include a "Chain of Custody" section. While there were no proposals for RUSSL updates, working groups were formed to review the language of RUSSL labeling requirements.

The 2026 AASCO Annual Meeting will be held in Pennsylvania. Meeting dates and location information will be announced later.

For more information about AASCO, please visit http://www.seedcontrol.org.

For more information regarding this article, contact Regulatory Manager Lan Chi Trinh at (704) 810-7272; lan-chin.trinh@usda.gov.

ASSOCIATION OF OFFICIAL SEED CERTIFYING AGENCIES ANNUAL MEETING

The Association of Official Seed Certifying Agencies (AOSCA) held its Annual Meeting June 15-18, 2026, in Golden, Colorado. There were close to 100 participants from across the U.S. Lan Chi Trinh, Regulatory Manager, represented SRTD at the meeting and at the AOSCA Advisory Committee to give updates on SRTD and U.S. OECD Program activities.

The General Membership meeting and the Standards Council meeting were held during this time to discuss proposed amendments to the existing AOSCA Standard, including lowering the germination requirement for small grains and updating the language for fluorescent ryegrass references. Additional highlights included presentations by Tom O'Neil on the National Agricultural Genotyping Center, Terry Hollifield on conditioning inspection, and James Weatherly on IP protection and its significance to certification agencies.

The next AOSCA Annual Meeting will be held in Santa Ana Pueblo, NM, June 14-17, 2027.

For more information about AOSCA, please visit https://aosca.org.

For more information regarding this article, contact Regulatory Manager Lan Chi Trinh at (704) 810-7272; lan-chin.trinh@usda.gov.

OECD SEED SCHEMES 2026

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Schemes for the Varietal Certification or the Control of Seed Moving in International Trade, more commonly known as the OECD Seed Schemes, is an international agreement involving 64 countries. The goal is to encourage the use of high-quality seed by establishing harmonized standards for certified seed in international trade. The Seed Schemes were created in 1958, prior to the establishment of OECD. When OECD was formed in 1961, the Schemes were incorporated into the new organization and the United States was a founding OECD member.

Officially, USDA AMS is considered the National Designated Authority (NDA). In practice, U.S. implementation of the Seed Schemes is managed by the U.S. OECD Seed Schemes Program, located within SRTD. In addition to representing the U.S. to the OECD Seed Schemes, the program supports the U.S. OECD seed certification conducted by 29 cooperating State Seed Certifying Agencies, serving the interests of U.S. seed producers who utilize the Seed Schemes for international shipments.

2026 Annual Meeting Outcomes

The annual meeting of the OECD Seed Schemes was held at the OECD Headquarters in Paris on June 18-19 and was preceded by Ad Hoc Working Groups (AWHG) meetings and the Technical Working Group (TWG). Pending confirmation by the Committee on Agriculture (CoAg) and the OECD Council, the following approved changes will go into effect on January 1, 2027:

- Bolivia has paid their arrears. An evaluation mission will be conducted in October 2026, after which a special delegate meeting will be scheduled to consider full reinstatement.
- Digital hub funding: Ongoing maintenance costs for the hub will be funded by a €1406 increase in the basic fee paid by each participating country.
- Digital hub launch: the hub will be launched for live testing by NDAs in October 2026. All participating countries are expected to adopt use of the hub by 2031.
- Styrian oil pumpkin (*Cucurbita pepo* L. var *styriaca* Greb.) added to the Crucifer and Other Oil & Fibre Species Scheme.
- Latvia's extension of participation to include the Crucifer and Other Species Scheme.
- Rearrangement of Species in the Schemes
  - The current Grass & Legume scheme split into three separate schemes:
    - Grass
    - Legumes (small-seeded legumes and subterranean clovers)
    - Pulses (large-seeded legumes). Peanuts will be moved from the Crucifer and Other Oil & Fibre Scheme.
  - Eliminated the Subterranean Clover & Similar Species Scheme (species moved the Legumes Scheme)
  - Renamed the Crucifer and Other Oil & Fibre Species Scheme to Crucifer and Other Species Scheme.
- The program part of the Programme of Work & Budget for 2027-2030 was approved. Approval of the budget portion is delayed pending additional discussions at the Council level on broader OECD funding and priorities.
- Terms of Reference for the AHWG on Traceability have been agreed upon.
- The new name for the current Advisory Group on Biochemical and Molecular Techniques will be the Advisory Group on Techniques for Varietal Identity and Purity Assessment with revised Terms of Reference.



2026 OECD Seed Schemes Annual Meeting (Steve Malone SRTD AMS)

Ongoing Discussions for 2027 and beyond:

- The rearrangement of the Grass & Legume Schemes will require significant editing to the Rules & Regulations, which will need close review as that effort progresses at the 2027 TWGs and annual Meeting.
- Expression of varietal purity standards in percentages: The original concept would be more consistent with U.S. standards and there is general support for further consideration of this. However, there are some questions about the equivalencies of plant vs. area-based inspections. The intended outcome is for an approach that would implement changes for some species but keep current area-based standards in place for others. This will take several years and updates will be made to the rules along the way. A case study is being planned to compare methods in a model system for the 2027 growing season.
- Continue to push the Advisory Group on Varietal Identity and Purity Assessment to make progress on use of laboratory techniques for variety purity.
- The Coordinating Centre will continue to collect data and experimental information on the temporary hybrid wheat standards that are currently focused only on CMS hybrids. Standards for NMS hybrids need to be further developed.
- Evaluation of the digital hub by countries who can be involved in live usage.

- Discussion of the future role, meeting frequency, and structure of the TWG and AHWGs.

The next meeting of the TWG will be in February 2027 (exact dates and venue TBD) hosted by Poland. The 2027 annual meeting is scheduled for the week of June 21-25, 2027, at the OECD Headquarters.

U.S. Program Notes:
With the digital hub finally being open for live testing, we will have more clarity as we continue working with cooperating agencies on procedures to collect and report new data points such as tag serial numbers and post-control results for individual lots. Most of the direct interaction with the hub will occur from the U.S. OECD Seed Schemes program, but there may be future opportunities for direct access from individual agencies.

Assessment Fees:
As of July 1, 2026, the U.S. OECD Seed Schemes Program assessment fees are 47 cents per hundredweight for maize; 38 cents per hundredweight for cereals, cotton, soybean, sunflower, and sorghum; and 36 cents per hundredweight for all other species and mixtures. Program revenue and expenses will be reviewed this fall and a decision on the fee structure to be effective July 1, 2027, will be announced in January 2027, but will be subject to modification following additional USDA review in March/April 2027.

Reminders:
The Variety Query (https://www.niab.com/oecdv2/) is recommended for confirming that varieties are listed as eligible for certification. This tool is much easier to use than the PDF version and is updated as varieties are added throughout the year.

Requests for Multiplication Abroad Agreements should be submitted to our office as soon as possible before or near the beginning of the production season in the country where the production will take place. Requests should include variety descriptions and details needed by the producing country. Late season requests cause difficulties for the certifying agency in the multiplying country. Foreign seed lots imported into the U.S. for multiplications with country tags are required to have a Multiplication Agreement from the Country of Registration of the variety.

Shipments to the EU, and several other countries, require OECD labels. Reciprocally, seed coming from those countries should bear OECD labels rather than country labels. We can work with the NDA of the other country to resolve shipments with the wrong labels, but even if a resolution can be worked out, the seed may still be delayed in getting to the international customer.

U.S. OECD Seed Schemes Program page: http://www.ams.usda.gov/rules-regulations/fsa/oecd-schemes

OECD Seed Schemes page: Seeds | OECD.

For more information regarding this article, contact OECD Program Manager Steve Malone at(704) 810-8888; steve.malone@usda.gov.

ISTA ANNUAL MEETING 2026

The ISTA Annual Meeting was held June 22–25 in Calgary, Canada. SRTD Director Ernest Allen represented the U.S. and served as ISTA President at the meeting. This marked a significant occasion for both ISTA and Canada, as it was the first time the country had hosted the Annual Meeting since 1983. The event offered an important opportunity for seed testing professionals, technical experts, regulators, and industry representatives to exchange perspectives on testing methods, emerging technologies, and other issues influencing global seed trade.

The meeting included a well-received seminar on the practical implications of seed quality and seed testing, along with discussions on new technologies such as artificial intelligence and advanced imaging tools. These conversations highlighted the need for seed sector stakeholders to embrace innovation and apply it to strengthen the accuracy and reliability of seed testing standards.

ISTA Congress discussed the strategic plan for the remainder of the triennium (2025-2028), which includes promoting the inclusion of tropical and subtropical species in the ISTA Rules. This work is essential to ensure that ISTA standards serve and are used by the full diversity of global seed stakeholders. The joint ISTA-ISSS webinar series

have highlighted key developments in wild seed species research and recent advances in seed functional ecology with a particular emphasis on tropical species.

For ISTA rules updates that were passed during the annual meeting, please view page 6.

For more information regarding this article, contact Division Director Ernest Allen at (704) 810-8884; ernest.allen@usda.gov.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- ASTA Forage, Turf & Conservation Seed Conference
  Kansas City, MO; November 17, 2026
- ASTA Field Crop Seed Convention
  Chicago, IL; December 7-10, 2026
- AOSCA Southern Region Meeting
  Greenville, SC; March 22, 2027
- AOSCA Northern Region Meeting
  Indianapolis, IN; April 6, 2027
- AOSCA Western Region Meeting
  Boise, ID; April 20, 2027
- AOSA-SCST Annual Meeting
  Nashville, TN; June 6-10, 2027
- AOSCA Annual Meeting
  Santa Ana Pueblo, NM; June 14-17, 2027
- OECD Seed Schemes Annual Meeting
  Paris, France; June 21-25, 2027
- ISTA Annual Meeting
  Angers, France; July 5-8, 2027

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2026-2027 SEED INDUSTRY RULE UPDATES

AOSA Rules Updates	Align with FSA
Added 'Top of Blotters' to the list of substrata to be available to use for planting *Ocimum bascilicum*	
Clarified section 5.2.b.2 of the Rules "Example 8, Mixture of Annual and Perennial Ryegrass"	
Changed the abbreviation of the substrata for "Between Blotters" in Table 6A from "B" to "BB"	"B" is used in FSA
Added Field Pennycress (*Thlaspi arvense*) purity weights into Table A	
Amended the contaminating classification for Field Pennycress (*Thlaspi arvense*) from weed to agriculture	
Added a guideline for adding and updating nomenclature and common names in the Rules	
Added 15-25° C to germination method of canarygrass (*Phalaris canariensis*) and changed final count to 14 days	Canarygrass final count in FSA is 7 days

ISTA Rules Updates	Align with FSA
Added instructions to indicate what test was performed in 'other determinations' on ISTA certificates	
Added definitions of sealed and self-sealing containers to sampling section	
Added how to mark/ label sealed containers to sampling section	
Changed pure seed definition *Paspalum spp.* – labs no longer need to check for the presence of a caryopsis	Caryopsis presence of *Paspalum spp.* is checked in FSA
Added how to report specified inert matter – if requested, labs can report the percentage of a specific type of inert matter	All types of inert matter are reported together in FSA
Changed language in alternating temperatures description – from *should* to: "lower temperatures *must* be maintained for 16 h and the higher for 8 h."	
Added caution statement for potassium nitrate	
Added ethephon as dormancy breaking procedure for *Helianthus annuus*	
Added drying instructions for pre-soaked *Beta vulgaris* – seed must be dried at 20-25C	
Added tolerance tables for 50 and 25 seed replications	
Added new method of Tetrazolium testing for *Glycine max*	

ISTA Rules Updates	Align with FSA
Added a procedure to check the quality of Tetrazolium solution when made with new salt	
Changed temperature range in Seed Health Testing sections 7-019a and 7-019b	
Added new seed health method for *Fusarium* in cereals	
Added statements for seed health test reports	
Added new DNA method for *Hordeum vulgare*	
Reduced test duration for *Lolium spp.* fluorescence from 14 to 10 days	The final count for a fluorescence test on *Lolium spp.* is 14 days in FSA
Added report statements for moisture tests on coated seeds	
Added radicle emergence test for *Allium spp.*	
Added cold test for *Zea mays*	
Added specifications for radicle emergence in soybeans	