

USDA Seed Regulatory and Testing Division Winter 2026

ITEMS OF INTEREST IN SEED

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STATE SEED REGULATORS QUARTERLY MEETING

The Seed Regulatory and Testing Division (SRTD) conducts regional quarterly virtual meetings with State Seed Control Officials (SCOs). The goal of the meeting is to promote better communication and working relationships with SCOs and discuss current industry issues. Topics from the most recent meetings included:

There has been a rise in inquiries from companies seeking permits to sell seed in the United States. SRTD does not issue seed sale permits and directs companies to contact the individual State(s) where the seed will be marketed.

Instances have been noted where more than one name is used for the same variety—for example, the variety commonly called “Watermelon” radish is also known as “Red Meat” radish. Under the Federal Seed Act, the variety name must be the first name under

which the seed was introduced into U.S. commerce.

The variety name has been updated for Castaic® oat following the registration of a trademark. Moving forward, Castaic® will be used as a brand name. The true variety name, 046054-2, is required to appear on the seed label.

Details on recent case settlements are available on the website: <https://www.ams.usda.gov/rules-regulations/fsa/complaints/settled-cases>.

Trueness-to-variety field trials for 2026 will include carrot, lettuce, and sweet corn.

SRTD’s quarterly State Regulator meetings provide a forum where SCOs can ask questions and receive guidance. To support discussion across a broad range of topics, the meetings are attended by all relevant staff, including the SRTD Director, Laboratory Supervisor, OECD Seed Schemes Program Manager, and regulatory staff.

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

IDENTIFYING LETTUCE NECROSIS

Identifying lettuce necrosis during seedling evaluation can be challenging, as its symptoms often mimic other forms of stress or damage. The Association of Official Seed Analysts (AOSA) Rules outlines the specific criteria analysts must use to identify even the most subtle patterns of tissue collapse with a high degree of precision.

To be classified as normal, a lettuce seedling must have healthy cotyledons with minimal or no decay, an elongated and intact hypocotyl, and a long primary root. Many of the lettuce abnormalities described in the AOSA Rules are similar to those found in other species, including missing roots, hypocotyl lesions, and decay. However, necrosis is an abnormality unique to lettuce and can be challenging to classify accurately.

In lettuce seedlings, necrosis presents as discolored patches on the cotyledons, typically emerging along the midrib or near the lateral veins. It must be distinguished from the normal pigmentation patterns found in various lettuce cultivars. A lettuce cotyledon is considered completely defective if:

- necrosis develops at the point of attachment of both cotyledons or
- when only one cotyledon exhibits necrosis at the attachment point and more than half of its total cotyledonary tissue is compromised.

However, the presence of necrosis is not an immediate indication of abnormality. If there is necrosis present on the cotyledons, but it affects less than half of the cotyledons and there is no necrosis at the point of attachment, then that seedling is considered normal.

While this may seem like a straightforward rule on paper, putting it into practice can be complicated. Sometimes discoloration caused by necrosis can be mistaken for the natural pigmentation of the cotyledons or vice versa, leading to an incorrect evaluation of the

seedling as normal or abnormal. It is recommended to use light and magnification to determine the cause of discoloration at the point of attachment to minimize error.

Identifying lettuce necrosis is essential because it reflects both genetic and environmental stress factors that compromise seed performance. By following AOSA Rules, seed analysts provide growers and distributors with reliable data on seed viability, helping prevent crop loss and ensuring compliance with regulatory standards. Accurate detection of necrosis not only protects agricultural productivity but also supports consumer confidence in seed labeling and certification.



A lettuce seedling exhibiting necrosis. (Kathryn McGinnis AMS SRTD 2026)

For more information regarding this article, contact Botanist Kathryn McGinnis at (704) 810-8872; kathryn.mcginis@usda.gov.

FEDERAL SEED ACT CASES SETTLED

The Federal Seed Act (FSA) provides the authority for the regulation of interstate shipments of agricultural and vegetable seeds. The FSA requires that seed shipped in interstate commerce are labeled with certain information necessary for the seed buyer to make an informed choice. The labeling

information and any advertisements pertaining to the seed must be truthful.

USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) administers the FSA by leveraging its resources with State departments of agriculture.

Between October 1, 2024, and September 30, 2025, a total of 17 seed companies paid \$142,307 to settle alleged violations of the FSA. These investigations were a result of joint efforts with seed regulatory officials in Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, New York, Pennsylvania, Texas, Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.

By working collaboratively with State partners, the Seed Regulatory and Testing Division helps promote uniformity among State seed laws and fair competition within the seed trade through the enforcement of the FSA.

For specific information regarding these violations, please visit [Federal Seed Act Cases Settled | Agricultural Marketing Service](#).

For more information regarding this article, contact Seed Marketing Specialist Kevin Robinson at (704) 810-7264; kevin.robinson2@usda.gov.

CASTAIC® OAT UPDATE

In early 2025, SRTD received a report of a possible Federal Seed Act (FSA) violation involving the trademarked variety name Castaic® oat. Under FSA regulations, section 201.34(d)(4) states: "The status under the Federal Seed Act of a variety name is not modified by the registration of such name as a trademark." The variety owner was notified and has taken corrective action. Going forward, Castaic® will be used solely as a brand name and will be clearly identified as such on the label. The variety name is "046054-2" and is required to be on the label. A brand name may not be used as a substitute for the variety name.

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

LABELING VARIETY NAMES FOR VEGETABLE SEED

In recent years, vegetable production has become increasingly specialized, making the development of new varieties essential to the seed industry. Growers, including both commercial producers and home gardeners, rely on characteristics such as disease resistance, flavor, maturity, storage life, yield potential, and adaptability when selecting varieties for production. Understanding how varieties are named requires distinguishing between a "kind" and a "variety" of seed.

Under Federal Seed Act (FSA) section 101(a)(11), "kind" is the term used for the seed of one or more related species or subspecies known by a common name such as carrot, radish, wheat, or soybean.

FSA section 101(a)(12) defines variety as "a subdivision of a kind which is characterized by growth, plant, fruit, seed or other characters by which it can be differentiated from other sorts of the same kind." Furthermore, FSA regulations section 201.34(d) establishes the following requirements when naming varieties of seed:

1. A variety must be assigned a name that is unique to the kind of seed to which the variety belongs.
2. Once a name is assigned to a variety, that name shall not be used for another variety of the same kind.
3. Once a variety has been named, that variety name must remain unchanged for the life of the variety.
4. The variety name shall not be misleading.
5. The variety name cannot be altered or modified through trademark registration.

The FSA requires that all vegetable seeds sold in interstate commerce be labeled with the correct variety name and that all labeling information be truthful. A brand name cannot be used in place of a variety name on the label.

These requirements ensure that each variety is uniquely and consistently identified throughout its commercial life. Following FSA naming and labeling standards helps prevent misrepresentation, supports informed decision making, and reduces the risk of regulatory violations.

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

OECD SEED SCHEMES 2025 REVIEW

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Seed Schemes is an international agreement involving 62 countries. It was created for the purpose of promoting the use of high-quality seed around the world through the establishment of harmonized standards for certified seed moving in international trade. AMS serves as the National Designated Authority, representing the U.S. to the Seed Schemes and coordinating the OECD Seed Schemes activities performed by 30 state Seed Certification Agencies (SCAs) under a cooperative agreement.

2025 Annual Meeting Outcomes:

- Reinstatement of Zimbabwe to the Sorghum & Pearl Millet, Cereal, Grass & Legume, and Crucifer and Other Oil & Fibre Seed Schemes. Zimbabwe had been reinstated to the Maize Scheme in 2024.
- Exclusion of Bolivia from participation in the Seed Schemes under the arrears policy.
- Approved updated and new training modules, including field inspection programs for wheat, rice, subterranean clover, sorghum, and maize. An updated pool of trainers who could be utilized to conduct capacity building

training was approved in participating countries or potential new countries.

- Established a new Ad Hoc Working Group (AHWG) to review the Guidelines for Multiplication Abroad to determine if a new section or modifications are needed to address situations where more than two countries are involved in a multiplication. Poland agreed to chair the new AHWG, which will work on Terms of Reference at the 2026 Technical Working Group (TWG) to propose to the Annual Meeting.
- Revision of the procedure for a new country to join one or more Schemes. This clarifies conditions such as requirement for post-control results, the provision for a monitoring visit, and the development of an Action Plan by the new country within the first three years.
- No changes to the current rules on the issuance of duplicate OECD certificates, thus maintaining this action at the discretion of the NDA.
- Added a reference and a section on terms and conditions concerning the digital hub to the OECD Seed Schemes rules as recommended by the Legal Directorate. This reference defines the scope of use of hub data by the Secretariat.
- Merged the former AHWG on Labelling and the AHWG on Digitalization into a new AHWG on Traceability. This group met during the February 2026 TWG to draft Terms of Reference for recommendation to the 2026 Annual Meeting.
- Elected Mr. John Randall, New Zealand, as the incoming Vice-Chair on the Bureau, replacing Ms. Mona El-Kasier, Egypt, whose Bureau term is expiring. Other Bureau members for the next two years are: Ms. Anne-Laure Fondeur, France, Chair; and Ms. Wilhelmina Drost, Canada, Past-Chair.

Ongoing Discussions for 2026 (and beyond): Program revenue and expenses will be reviewed this fall, and a decision on the fee structure will be effective July 1, 2026.

- Digital Hub future funding: The U.S position is that all countries should share in the additional funding needed.

- Possible Re-Grouping of species within the schemes: The AHWG will continue to discuss splitting the current Grass & Legume Scheme into separate Schemes (Small-seeded legumes and Pulses Schemes).

- The AHWG will continue working through the concept of expressing all variety and purity standards in percentages.

- The newly formed AHWG on Traceability will likely be exploring the development of paper labels with digital elements connected to information in the digital hub and potentially other platforms such as ISTA.

- The temporary hybrid wheat established in 2021 will continue through at least 2035.

- Beginning in Fall 2025 the Seed Schemes and Forest, Seed and Plant Scheme will collaborate to develop harmonized standards for collection and trade of seed and propagating material of wild species.

2026 Meetings:

The 2026 annual meeting is scheduled for June 15-19, 2026. Both meetings will be held at OECD Headquarters in Paris.

Discussion webinars for industry stakeholders and Certification Agency cooperators will be hosted two weeks prior to the OECD meetings.

U.S. Program Notes:

Assessment Fees:

As of July 1, 2025, the current U.S. OECD Seed Schemes Program assessment fees are 44 cents per hundredweight for maize; 36 cents per hundredweight for cereals, cotton, soybean, sunflower, and sorghum; and 34 cents per hundredweight for all other species and mixtures.

U.S. OECD Program Staffing Update:

Beth Stewart, a Botanist and Auditor for SRTD, will be the primary backup for the OECD Seed Schemes program.

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

ISTA WELCOMES NEW PRESIDENT AND EXPANDS GLOBAL FOCUS AT 2025 CONGRESS

USDA AMS SRTD Director Ernest Allen has assumed the presidency of the International Seed Testing Association (ISTA). He was inaugurated during the association's 34th Congress, held May 5–9, 2025, in Christchurch, New Zealand. He succeeds Dr. Keshavulu Kunusoth and will serve a three-year term (2025–2028).

Allen's appointment follows his decade-long relationship with ISTA, beginning at the 2014 Edinburgh meeting. He has since served as vice chair of the Nomenclature Committee, ISTA Rules chair, and most recently as the vice president of the association. In his first presidential report, Allen outlined a strategic pivot toward Africa, Asia, and Latin America—regions he identified as both underserved and essential to global food security.

"This focus is not merely altruistic," Allen stated. "Strong seed systems in these areas will create new trade markets and expand access to exotic varieties in ISTA member countries." Partnerships with the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, OECD Seed Schemes, and the International Seed Federation are planned to advance this agenda.

Congress Highlights:

The Christchurch Congress—only the sixth in ISTA's century-long history to be held in the

Southern Hemisphere—drew more than 152 participants from 32 countries. Hosted by New Zealand’s Ministry for Primary Industries and chaired by Dr. Craig McGill (a past ISTA president), the event opened with a Seed Symposium exploring seed quality, biodiversity, and plant breeding technologies.

Four days of technical meetings followed, anchored by rule proposal reviews and reports from ISTA’s 20 Technical Committees, which collectively engage over 270 seed science experts. The Ordinary General Meeting concluded the Congress, approving the 2025–2028 working plans, voting on rules revisions, and installing new leadership.

Sergio Pasquini (Italy) was elected Vice President, joining eight members-at-large on the Executive Committee (ECOM): Ignacio Aranciaga (Argentina), Dimilly Didier (France), Ruel Gesmundo (Philippines), Irena Gera (Poland), Craig McGill (New Zealand), Claid Mujaju (Zimbabwe), Ruojing Wang (Canada), and Vanessa Sosa (Uruguay). Outgoing President Kunusoth (India) remains on the ECOM as Immediate Past President.

The association also honored departing ECOM members Sylvie Ducournau (France), Steve Jones (Canada), and Berta Killermann (Germany) for decades of service.

2025–2028 Strategy:

The new triennium strategy, adopted at the General Meeting, maintains ISTA’s six core goals with targeted refinements. Notably, it prioritizes the development of seed testing methods for tropical and subtropical species and calls for accelerated seed health method development through closer collaboration with the International Plant Protection Convention and National Plant Protection Organizations. The new strategy also formally names Africa, Asia, and Latin America as focal regions for capacity building.

Allen closed with an invitation to the 2026 ISTA Annual Meeting, set for Calgary, Canada. He

affirmed confidence in ISTA’s trajectory: “Our 100-year legacy is one of scientific excellence and international cooperation. We will continue to adapt and lead with the same focus.”

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

CELEBRATING THE RETIREMENT OF TODD ERICKSON

After more than two decades of dedicated service, Todd Erickson retired from the Seed Regulatory and Testing Division, where he built a career defined by technical expertise, steady leadership, and a strong commitment to the seed-testing community.

Todd’s path into the field was shaped by a broad interest in science and a willingness to explore different disciplines. He earned a B.S. in Anthropology from the University of Oregon and later a second B.S. in Botany from Northern Arizona University, inspired in part by his experience in a Master Gardener program. His early career included three years as a field botanist at Mt. Rainier National Park before he joined the Seed Regulatory and Testing Division in 2004 as a laboratory technician. In 2015, he became Laboratory Supervisor, a role in which he trained new analysts, supported seed companies in understanding Federal Seed Act requirements, and strengthened the technical foundation of the laboratory.

Todd’s influence extended well beyond his day-to-day responsibilities. He served in several leadership roles across the seed-testing profession, including positions on the AOSA Board, the AOSA Rules Committee, and the AOSA/SCST Lab Standards and Documentation Committee. He also contributed internationally through the ISTA Moisture Committee and as an ex officio member of the ISTA Rules Committee. His work as a Canadian grader examiner, lead auditor for the USDA Seed Accreditation Program, and technical auditor for the ISTA Audit Program demonstrated his ability to

evaluate laboratories and uphold rigorous standards. Todd also played a key role in education and training as coordinator and lead instructor for the USDA Seed School, helping prepare the next generation of seed professionals.

Todd's contributions have had a lasting impact on the division and the broader seed-testing community. We wish him the very best in retirement and look forward to hearing about his future adventures.



(Todd Erickson, 2025)

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- Association of Official Seed Certifying Agencies Southern Regional Meeting
Nashville, TN; March 26, 2026
- Association of Official Seed Certifying Agencies Western Regional Meeting
Ucross, WY; April 21, 2026
- ISTA Annual Meeting
Calgary, Canada; June 22-25, 2026

- AOSA/SCST Annual Meeting
Rochester, NY; June 5-11, 2026
- Association of Official Seed Certifying Agencies Annual Meeting
Golden, CO; June 15- 18, 2026
- Association of American Seed Control Officials
Minneapolis, MN; July 14-16, 2026
- AOSA/SCST Examination
Gastonia, NC; August 18 -19, 2026

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2026 Seed Industry Policy and Rule Change Highlights

All updates harmonize with the Federal Seed Act.

Association of Official Seed Analyst Rules for Testing Seeds	International Rules for Seed Testing	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development Seed Schemes
Improved the usability of Table 2A by replacing null values for noxious weed seed in species with defined purity weights. Improved reporting requirements for de-coated seed by requiring additional information on the method used. Updated the identification and description of aerial seedling structures of <i>Cyclamen africanum</i> in Volume 4 by changing the structure identified as “cotyledons” to “epicotyl.” Revised section 3.5.6 on Negative Geotropism in Volume 4 to clarify the differing geotropic responses of seedling shoots and roots and the correct evaluation of each. Added notes in Volume 4 under Poaceae, including Grass Family III–Corn and Grass Family I–Cereals, to clarify the evaluation of anthocyanin coloration that may appear in seedlings of <i>Zea mays</i>, <i>Secale cereale</i>, and <i>xTriticosecale</i>. Added a sketch to Poaceae Grass Family I in Volume 4 to clarify the proper evaluation of a detached coleoptile tip.	Revised subplot allowance of <i>Solanum lycopersicum</i> and other fleshy vegetable species: more species are now allowed to use up to 20 sublots, but only for seed lots no larger than 1,000 kg. Added new species <i>Diplotaxis tenuifolia</i> to sampling, purity, and germination sections. Updated to allow solutions up to 0.2% potassium nitrate to be used in germination test. Laboratories will state percentage used on ISTA Certificates. Changed minimum number of seeds required for tetrazolium test to 200 seeds for small seed lots. Added new method for detection of <i>Fusarium oxysporum</i> f.sp. <i>lycopersici</i> in <i>Solanum lycopersicum</i> seed, including a planting method with a molecular detection PCR. Added <i>Glycine max</i> and <i>Brassica spp.</i> as species to which radicle emergence test can be applied. Added ±0.5 g to give accuracy to non-acceptable seed weights after ageing in Chapter 15. Clarified conditions under which GMO test results can refer to either seed lot or seed sample.	Reinstated Zimbabwe to the Sorghum & Pearl Millet, Cereal, Grass & Legume, and Crucifer and Other Oil & Fibre Seed Schemes. Approved new and updated training modules, including field inspection programs for wheat, rice, subterranean clover, sorghum, and maize. Established a new Ad Hoc Working Group (AHWG) to review the Guidelines for Multiplication Abroad to determine if a new section or modifications are needed to address situations where more than two countries are involved in a multiplication agreement. Revision of the procedure for a new country to join one or more Schemes. This clarifies conditions such as requirements for post-control results, the provision for a monitoring visit, and the development of an Action Plan by the new country within the first three years. Added a reference and a section in the OECD Seed Schemes Rules on terms and conditions concerning the digital hub. Merged the former AHWG on Labelling and the AHWG on Digitalization into a new AHWG on Traceability.