

# Seed Certification<sup>1</sup>

A. R. Blount, K. H. Quesenberry, and T. Stadslev<sup>2</sup>

## Introduction

Seed selection is a critical element in the success of any new planting. The old adage that “you get what you pay for” applies here. While producing a crop always has inherent risks, this is one aspect of production where the producer has control. Seed selection is important when deciding what crop to plant, what variety of that crop to plant, where and when to purchase the seed, the quality of the seed and the cost of that seed versus seed of another variety.

## Variety Selection

Choose a variety carefully. Plant breeders spend many years developing the excellent genetics you are purchasing. Varieties may differ from one another in hundreds or even thousands of pounds of yield. Land grant universities conduct variety tests on many crops and offer unbiased results of these trials to the public at no charge. UF/IFAS Extension offices, and/or specific websites often have this information available to the public. Check it out! Don't be persuaded by smooth marketing and slick advertising. Even your neighbor's success with a particular variety may not be fact, just opinion. Crop variety selection for an annual may be an important decision for one year. However, when planting a perennial species, variety selection is a decision that you may have to live with for a long time.

## Seed Quality

Seed quality is important. If the germination is poor or if the seed is contaminated with weed seed the result is often a poor stand and a weedy field. Certified seed is one way to ensure that the seed you purchase has been inspected and is the variety you want. It has a known germination and is free of noxious weed seed. While certified seed costs a little more than bin-run or carryover seed, the knowledge that your money has gone to purchase clean, viable seed should provide you with the assurance that you have planted the best.

Often, certified seed will outproduce non-certified seed varieties. In the 2000 Cool Season Ryegrass Variety Trials at Quincy, FL, certified ryegrass varieties yielded greater than a ton of dry matter more than common ryegrass over the season. Similarly, in the 2000 Rye Variety Trials at Quincy, there was over a ton of dry matter difference between certified rye varieties and non-certified Wrens Abruzzi. When the varieties are long lived or perennial, often the yield differences are even greater. For example, yield difference in dry matter between the best certified variety in the 1993 Kentucky Red Clover Variety Test and a non-certified common red was almost 12,000 pounds per acre over the life of the stand (N.L. Taylor; J.C. Henning; and G.D. Lacefield, 2000).

1. This document is SSAGR82, one of a series of the Agronomy Department, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date July 2000. Revised January 2005. Reviewed October 2015. Visit the EDIS website at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.
2. A. R. Blount, professor, North Florida Research and Education Center; K. H. Quesenberry, professor, Agronomy Department; UF/IFAS Extension Gainesville, FL 32611; and T. Stadslev, manager, Florida Foundation Seed Producers, Inc., Greenwood, FL. 32443.

The use of trade names in this publication is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. UF/IFAS does not guarantee or warranty the products named, and references to them in this publication do not signify our approval to the exclusion of other products of suitable composition.

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) is an Equal Opportunity Institution authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function with non-discrimination with respect to race, creed, color, religion, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, political opinions or affiliations. For more information on obtaining other UF/IFAS Extension publications, contact your county's UF/IFAS Extension office.

U.S. Department of Agriculture, UF/IFAS Extension Service, University of Florida, IFAS, Florida A & M University Cooperative Extension Program, and Boards of County Commissioners Cooperating. Nick T. Place, dean for UF/IFAS Extension.

Certified seed should be sown for reliable production. Remember, while certified seed doesn't guarantee a crop, it greatly reduces the risk of failure. You want to have a good foundation on your house, the best genetics in your herd, and reliable farm equipment. Approach your variety selection with those same thoughts in mind. Choose wisely and choose the very best quality seed available to you.

## Crop Improvement Associations

Crop Improvement Associations are organizations of seed producers interested in making available to the public, through certification, high quality seeds and propagating materials of superior varieties. Crop Improvement Associations emphasize genetic purity in the seed they produce.

Inspection of the crop is made by official inspectors under the direction of the Agronomist in charge of Seed Certification. Certified seed may be defined as seed certified by a Crop Improvement Association, stating seed origin, adaptation, breeding, seed condition, purity of variety, and noxious weed seed.

By standardization and certification, the Crop Improvement Association enables the farmer to secure the best seed for his/her farm. Certification aids farmers in producing seed of known varieties and assures high quality and superior performance of the seed.

## Certified Seed

Some seed is not certified. Not all varieties of seed have a class of certified seed. This does not necessarily mean that it is not high quality seed. Check each bag of seed for information, on a tag or otherwise attached, for the kind of seed (species), container weight, and information about seed quality on a weight basis. **Blue tags indicate "certified" seed.** Certified seed can be readily identified by the official tag of a Crop Improvement Association attached to the container of seed. Tags are serially numbered to identify the seed by a lot number and/or certification number. Tags or labels will identify the certifying agencies involved, as well as the kind, variety, and class of seed. The label will also state the percentages of pure seed, weed seed, inert matter, or other crop seed, hard seed, seed germination and date of test. Information on the net weight of seed and where the seed was produced is included. When certified seed is sold in bulk lots, the seed must be accompanied by a bulk retail sale certificate. Certified seed standards of the Association must meet or exceed the minimum standards approved by the Association of Official Seed Certifying Agencies (AOSCA).

**All seed sold as certified seed MUST have an official certified tag attached OR it is NOT certified.**

## Summary

Tips on buying certified seed: 1) Buy seed produced by a professional seed grower. Research has shown that crops produced from professionally grown seed yield more than those produced from farmer or binseed; 2) Read the seed tag carefully. Select seeds that have high germination and have little inert materials, weed or other crop seed; 3) Look at the test date to be sure that the germination test results are still valid; 4) Avoid any seed lots where the variety is not stated on the seed tag. The "Variety Not Stated" seed may actually be a mixture of varieties or non-adapted varieties for your area; 5) Know the variety that you are planting; 6) Look for the **BLUE Certified Seed** tag as a guarantee of genetic purity and quality.

For further information contact:

Southern Seed Certification Association, Inc.  
PO Box 2619  
Auburn, AL 36831-2619  
Phone: (334) 844-4995  
Fax: (334) 844-4901  
Contact: Robert Burdett, Executive Vice President

Georgia Crop Improvement Association  
2425 South Milledge Avenue  
Athens, GA 30605-1639  
Phone/Fax: (706) 542-2351 (706) 542-9397  
Terry Hollifield, Seed Certification Specialist