



Canadian Food  
Inspection Agency

Agence canadienne  
d'inspection des aliments

## Canadian Food Inspection Agency



### **Our vision:**

To excel as a science-based regulator, trusted and respected by Canadians and the international community.

### **Our mission:**

Dedicated to safeguarding food, animals and plants, which enhances the health and well-being of Canada's people, environment and economy.

## ***Canada taking new direction in seed marketing requirements?***

### ***Michael Scheffel, Seed Section, Field Crops Division, Plant Health and Biosecurity Directorate***

***The European Conference on Ensuring Seed Availability in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, March 18, 2009, Brussels***

Canada

# Canada's Flexible Variety Registration System





# Seed Program Modernization Initiative (SPMI)

- SPMI consists of focussed efforts to improve the Canadian seed policy, regulatory and institutional frameworks to:
  - remove or reduce barriers to diversification, innovation, competitiveness, profitability and sustainability
  - maintain and enhance consumer confidence, protect the environment, and contribute to food safety
  - be inclusive, transparent and responsive to emerging challenges

# What is variety registration?

- The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) acts as a 'gate keeper' by overseeing the varieties available in the marketplace.
- The purpose of variety registration is to ensure that:
  - health and safety requirements are met,
  - information is available to regulator to prevent fraud; and to
  - facilitate seed certification and the international trade of seed
- Currently pre-registration testing and merit assessment are required to demonstrate that a variety performs equal to or better than reference varieties.

# What is merit?

- A variety is determined to have merit if it performs as well as or better than standard reference varieties with respect to:
  - agronomic (yield, time to maturity)
  - quality (e.g. protein and oil content)
  - disease tolerance characteristics
- Evaluated by recommending committees approved by the Minister
- Includes field, and in some cases laboratory, tests
- The testing protocols and merit assessment criteria are regularly reviewed and approved by the CFIA
- The proposed flexible variety registration regulatory amendments remove the requirement for merit for some crops (potatoes and sunflower)

# What crops require variety registration?

- Most agricultural crops are subject to variety registration
- Notable exceptions: corn, chickpeas, sorghum, food-type soybeans and turf grasses
- The value-chain for these crops decided that merit requirements posed undue regulatory burden
- There was no flexibility in the registration system to register varieties without merit

# Why are changes to the variety registration system required?

- “One size fits all” approach no longer viable because different crop sectors have different challenges and opportunities
- An amendment to the Seeds Regulations is required to change the variety registration system to allow for varying levels of oversight with reduced regulatory burden
- The amendment will create a more flexible variety registration system that will aim to reduce regulatory burden, support innovation, enhance competitiveness and improve the diversity of varieties available to producers.

# What are the changes to the variety registration system?

- Basic requirements to protect health and safety, prevent fraud and facilitate seed certification will not change (pedigree, variety description, legal reference sample, etc.)
- Three regulatory options with varying registration requirements:
  - Tier I: Pre-registration testing and merit assessment to ensure that varieties meet minimum standards (status quo).
  - Tier II: Pre-registration testing to provide official oversight of the validity of pre-registration testing.
  - Tier III: No additional requirements.
- The goal is to create the framework for the flexible system.
- Further amendments will place crops within these tiers.



# What is the process for future crop placement?

- A clear rationale (cost : benefit) and a demonstration of an appropriate level of consensus for the change within the crop value chain are required
- CFIA is responsible for consulting with all crop sectors to ensure all crop types have the appropriate registration requirements.
  - Placement in a different tier requires further regulatory amendments
- Recommending committees are able to modify merit requirements by amending their Procedures
  - Does not require regulatory amendments
  - Requires approval by the CFIA on behalf of the Minister

## Have stakeholders been consulted on the amendments?

- Extensive consultation with stakeholders since 1998
- Stakeholder consensus was difficult due to the lack of an effective stakeholder engagement forum
- An industry-led, government enabled stakeholder forum (the National Forum on Seed) was established in 2005
- 4 Variety Registration Working Group meetings provided input into the development of the flexible variety registration proposal
- Consultations on the proposal included a six-month online consultation as well as five regional and two national stakeholder meetings
- The proposed regulatory amendments were posted for public comment for a 75-day period in June, 2008



# What overall impact will the amendments have?

- Reduce the impediments to timely and cost-effective variety registration
- Encourage innovation and competitiveness in the seed sector
- Fewer regulatory roadblocks prior to commercialization
- Timely access to new varieties
- Increased choice in the number of varieties available to producers and end users
- Cost savings for variety developers due to reduced testing

# What are some of the similarities between the EU and Canadian seed systems?

- Based on variety identity, varietal purity and official certification
- Compliance with international standards and procedures such as the OECD Seed Schemes
- Allows authorization of private entities for implementation with official oversight.
- EU has SLIM (Simpler Legislation for the Internal Market) and Canada had “Smart Regulations” as drivers for change

# What are some of the differences between the EU and Canadian systems?

- The EU affirmed the importance of Value for Cultivation and Use (VCU)
  - Canada has proposed new flexibility for merit requirements
- Canada does not have issues regarding
  - Free movement of treated seed
  - Non-harmonized authorization of plant protection products
  - National catalogue/Common catalogue
  - Different registration and VCU requirements among member states
- Canada has been an early adopter of GM technology



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