



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Animal and
Plant Health
Inspection
Service

Plant Protection
and Quarantine

Clearing Seeds for Planting

A Job Aid for CBP Officers



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Procedures for Clearing Consignments of Seeds for Planting

The following are procedures to enable Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Officers to clear shipments of seeds intended for planting or for seed production (seed increase).

Seed constitutes the main structure for plant increase and, at the same time, one of the main vehicles for the dissemination of plant pests. Seed-borne pathogens, such as fungi, bacteria and viruses are serious threats to American agriculture. In the worst-case scenario, seed-borne diseases can be disastrous and even life threatening.

Step 1—Look to see whether there is a green and yellow or red and white mailing label attached to the package or container

These labels direct the package to an APHIS-PPQ, Plant Inspection Station where the seeds will be inspected.

Table 1 Expediting Packages with Green and Yellow or Red and White Mailing Labels

| If there is: | And: | Then: |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| A Green and Yellow (PPQ Form 508) or Red and White (PPQ Form 599) mailing label attached (see Figure 1) ¹ | Only a green and yellow or red and white mailing label is attached (one address per package) | ALLOW the package to proceed to the Plant Inspection Station identified on the label |
| | There is an additional mailing label ² | CONTACT the nearest Plant Inspection Station for directions on how to proceed |
| No green and yellow nor red and white mailing label attached | → | GO to Step 2—Screen the consignment using the list of nursery stock restrictions on page 5 |

- 1 For more information on these forms, go to the [Manual for Agricultural Clearance](#).
- 2 If this is an expedited courier package, the address for delivery must be the same as the PPQ label. Otherwise, prohibit entry.



Figure 1 Green and Yellow and Red and White Mailing Labels



Older forms do **not** have the bar code but are still valid.

Step 2—Screen the consignment using the list of nursery stock restrictions

Determine the requirements for admissibility or whether the seeds are prohibited using the [List of Nursery Stock Restrictions](#). Then use the following table.

Table 2 Screening Seeds for Admissibility

| If the seed is: | And: | And: | Then: |
|-------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| Prohibited | Accompanied by a PPQ Departmental Permit for experimental purposes or an equivalent e-Permit | → | 1. SECURE the package 2. REFER to a Plant Inspection Station |
| | Lacks the permit described above | → | PROHIBIT ENTRY |
| A Federal Noxious Weed or parasitic plant | Accompanied by a PPQ Form 526 or an equivalent e-Permit | → | 1. SECURE the package 2. REFER to a Plant Inspection Station |
| | Lacks the permit described above | → | PROHIBIT ENTRY |
| Admissible | Accompanied by a Foreign Phytosanitary Certificate ¹ , a Canadian Seed Analysis Certificate (CFIA Form 5289), a PPQ Form 925, or a Seed Export Label (CFIA Form 5309) | → | GO to Table 3 |
| | Lacks the above documentation | Accompanied by a Small Lots of Seed Permit | REFER to a Plant Inspection Station |
| | | Lacks the permit described above | PROHIBIT ENTRY |

1 Corn and corn relatives (broomcorn (*Andropogon sorghum* var. *technicus*), sweet sorghums *Andropogon sorghum*), grain sorghums (*Andropogon sorghum*), Sudan grass (*Andropogon sorghum sudanensis*), Johnson grass (*Andropogon halepensis*), sugarcane (*Saccharum officinarum*), including Japanese varieties, pearl millet (*Pennisetum glaucum*), napier grass *Pennisetum purpureum*), teosinte (*Euchlaena luxurians*), and jobs-tears (*Coix lachryma-Jobi*) and seed cotton are **exempt** from the requirement for phytosanitary certification.

Table 3 Taking Action on Admissible Seed Accompanied by a Phytosanitary Certificate

| If the seed: | And the consignment: | And: | Then: |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Requires a PPQ Written Permit ¹ but not treatment | Is accompanied by a permit | Is an Agricultural (FSA-A) or Vegetable seed (FSA-V) ² | GO to Table 4 |
| | | Is not an Agricultural (FSA-A) or Vegetable seed (FSA-V) | REFER to the Plant Inspection Station identified in the permit |
| | Lacks a permit | —————→ | PROHIBIT ENTRY |
| Requires treatment | Is accompanied by a permit | Is Niger seed (<i>Guizotia abyssinica</i>) | CONTACT CBP AS ³ |
| | | Is other than Niger seed | REFER to the Plant Inspection Station identified in the permit |
| | Lacks a permit | —————→ | PROHIBIT ENTRY |
| Is CITES or ESA | —————→ | —————→ | HAVE the importer or the importer's broker SEND the consignment to the local Plant Inspection Station ⁴ |
| Is coated or pelleted seed | Accompanied by CFIA Form 5289 or PPQ Form 925 | —————→ | RELEASE |
| | Lacks either of the documents listed above | Conforms to Obscured Seed Protocol ⁵ | 1. REMOVE a few seeds from the substrate to ensure they are the same as the seeds in the official sample ⁶ 2. GO to GO to Table 4 |
| | | Does not conform to Obscured Seed Protocol | PROHIBIT ENTRY |
| Is U.S. seed returned | —————→ | —————→ | GO to Table 8 |
| Fits none of the categories listed in the cells above | —————→ | —————→ | GO to Table 4 |

1 **All** seeds of woody plants from any country **except** Canada require a written permit.

2 **Most** FSA regulated seeds do **not** require a written permit. Those that require a written permit but no treatment are corn and corn relatives (blue panicgrass, broomcorn, field corn, foxtail millet, green panicgrass, guineagrass, Japanese millet, johnsongrass, napier grass, pearl millet, popcorn, proso millet, sorghum, sorghum alnum, sorghum-sudangrass, sorgrass, sudangrass sweet corn, and switchgrass). For **all other** FSA-regulated seed, GO to [Table 4](#).

- 3 Niger seed is usually imported as birdseed, which requires mandatory devitalization. If the seed is being imported for planting, the importer is probably unaware of the requirement for devitalization.
- 4 If the importer declines to take financial responsibility for sending the consignment, CALL the Plant Inspection Station for guidance.
- 5 The shipment must be accompanied both by a PPQ Permit for Obscured Seed and by an importer document, such as an International Seed Testing Association (ISTA) certificate, declaring the sample was taken by a government authorized official and the method of sampling complies with ISTA requirements.
- 6 If the seeds are **not** what are in the sample, CALL the Plant Inspection Station for guidance.

Procedures for Inspecting Consignments of Seed for Planting

For additional guidance, inspectors will need to use the directions that follow, the List of Regulated Propagative Material from the *Nursery Stock Restrictions Manual*, and the *Canadian Border Manual*, for additional guidance. Additionally, the APHIS–PPQ Botanist can provide specific guidance and suggestions for sampling and clearing those Agricultural and Vegetable seeds covered by the Federal Seed Act (FSA).

If you are clearing seeds for planting at the Northern border, consult the *Canadian Border Manual*. Otherwise, continue to the following table.

Table 4 Preparing for Inspection

| If the seed was: | And: | And the lot: | Then: |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| An Agricultural (FSA-A) or Vegetable seed (FSA-V) | Appropriately labeled or with a declaration ¹ | Weighs less than 5 pounds | INSPECT AND RELEASE |
| | | Weighs 5 pounds or more | PROCEED to “ Equipment Needed to Inspect Seed ” on page-8 |
| | Not labeled as required ^{1 2} | —————→ | PROHIBIT ENTRY |
| Not Agricultural (FSA-A) or Vegetable seed (FSA-V) | —————→ | Weighs less than 5 pounds | INSPECT AND RELEASE |
| | —————→ | Weighs 5 pounds or more | PROCEED to “ Equipment Needed to Inspect Seed ” on page-8 |

- 1 The labeling or declaration must provide the following information:
 - ◆ The kind, variety, and origin of each lot of seed
 - ◆ The designation “hybrid” when the lot contains hybrid seed
 - ◆ If the seed was treated, the name of the substance or process used to treat the seed
- 2 Allow the importer to provide a declaration of labeling with all of the required information bulleted in footnote 1 above. Once you have the declaration of labeling, PROCEED to “[Equipment Needed to Inspect Seed](#)” on [page-8](#)

Equipment Needed to Inspect Seed

To collect the seed samples, ensure you have the equipment listed in **Figure 2** below.

- Cartridge type **dust mask** (to avoid breathing pesticide if the seed is treated)
- **Cloth** (something the length of the trier to empty subsamples onto)
- **Container** (must hold at least a quart of seed)
- Knife
- Marking **pen**
- **PPQ Form 237** (Record of Seed Offered for Importation Under the Federal Seed Act)
- Protective **gloves** (to prevent skin exposure when sampling dusted seed)
- SEF return address envelope form
- **Tape** (to close opened, loose bags)
- **Trier**

Figure 2 A List of Equipment Needed to Sample Seed

Collecting the Sample

Follow these steps to sample the seed.

Step 1—Determine how large a sample to collect

Refer to **Table 5** as a guide.

Table 5 Amount of Seed to Collect from Each Lot ¹

| If the seed is in: | And the seed is admissible and categorized as: | Then: |
|-------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Bags or bulk | Agricultural (A) | 1. COLLECT 1 quart of seed 2. CONTINUE to Step 2—Compute how many subsamples to draw on page 9 |
| | Vegetable (V) | 1. COLLECT 1 pint of seed 2. CONTINUE to Step 2—Compute how many subsamples to draw on page 9 |
| | Other than Agricultural or Vegetable | 1. COLLECT at least 1 quart of seed 2. EXAMINE seed for contaminants 3. RELEASE if free from pests and contaminants |
| Small packets or hermetically sealed containers | —————▶ | CONTACT your local APHIS Botanist or the Seed Examination Facility (SEF) at (301) 504-8605 for directions on sampling |

¹ If the seed is woody, REFER it to the nearest Plant Inspection Station.

Step 2—Compute how many subsamples to draw

Once you know how much seed to collect for your sample, you must then calculate how many subsamples to draw to ensure a representative sample.

To compute how many subsamples to draw, determine how the seed is packaged.

Table 6 : Computing Number of Subsamples Based on Seed Packaging

| If the seed is in: | Then use: |
|--------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Bags or other non-hermetically sealed containers | <i>Seed in bags or other non-hermetically sealed packages</i> on page 9 for your computation |
| Bulk | <i>Bulk seed</i> on page 10 for your computation |

1. Seed in bags or other non-hermetically sealed packages

If the seed is packaged in bags, use **Table 7** to compute how many subsamples to draw. If the number of subsamples you draw does not provide enough seed for an adequate sample, draw the additional seed you need.

Table 7 Determining How Many Subsamples to Draw from Seed in Bags

| If the number of bags or packages in the shipment is: | Then draw this many subsamples to make your sample: | If the number of bags or packages in the shipment is: | Then draw this many subsamples to make your sample: |
|-------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| 1 to 6 | 5 | 125 to 134 | 18 |
| 7 to 14 | 6 | 135 to 144 | 19 |
| 15 to 24 | 7 | 145 to 154 | 20 |
| 25 to 34 | 8 | 155 to 164 | 21 |
| 35 to 44 | 9 | 165 to 174 | 22 |
| 45 to 54 | 10 | 175 to 184 | 23 |
| 55 to 64 | 11 | 185 to 194 | 24 |
| 65 to 74 | 12 | 195 to 204 | 25 |
| 75 to 84 | 13 | 205 to 214 | 26 |
| 85 to 94 | 14 | 215 to 224 | 27 |
| 95 to 104 | 15 | 225 to 234 | 28 |
| 105 to 114 | 16 | 235 to 244 | 29 |
| 115 to 124 | 17 | 245 or more | 30 |

Do **not** sample more than 30 bags per lot. If there are fewer than 5 bags in the lot, you must still draw five subsamples. You must also draw enough seed to fill your sample (1/2 pint, 1 pint, or 1 quart).

Go to *Step 3—Check the paperwork* on **page 10**.

2. Bulk seed

If the seed is being shipped in bulk (unpackaged or loose), use this calculation and the preceding table to compute how many subsamples to draw.

- A. Determine the weight of the lot.
- B. Divide the weight of the lot by 100.
- C. Take the result obtained by your division (consider this figure as the “equivalent number of bags”) and go back to **Table 7** to determine how many subsamples to draw. Refer to the following example.

EXAMPLE: How many subsamples would you draw from a 2,000-pound bulk shipment of oats?

Treat the shipment as a single lot.

1. The weight of the lot is 2,000 pounds.
 2. 2,000 divided by 100 = 20 (the equivalent number of bags).
 3. 20 falls between 15 and 24 on the matrix—which directs you to draw 7 subsamples.
-

Go to **Step 3—Check the paperwork** on page 10.

Step 3—Check the paperwork

Read the label or invoice to learn whether the seed was treated. If the seed is brightly colored (blue, orange, or pink, for example), assume it was treated regardless of what the label says.



If you know or believe the seed is treated, take these precautions.

- Avoid wiping your mouth or nose with your hands.
- Use plastic gloves and a dust mask.
- Wear eye protection.
- Wear protective coveralls.

Step 4—Draw your subsamples

Randomly draw your subsamples. If sampling a bulk shipment, draw your subsamples at equal intervals throughout the shipment.

If you are sampling a single bag, do not make more than a single hole with the trier; merely move the trier in different directions to collect the seed.

Step 5—Use the trier to draw your sample

- 1.** Insert the trier (with the holes down and closed) into the seed. It is better to enter the bag near its top to prevent spillage. If the seed is too large, does not flow freely, or the trier cannot penetrate the container, sample by hand.
- 2.** Rotate the inner sleeve of the trier to open the holes. Lightly move the trier back and forth to get the seed into the trier.
- 3.** Rotate the inner sleeve of the trier to close the holes.
- 4.** Remove the trier from the bag or bulk seed.
- 5.** Close the holes in the bag made by the trier. If a burlap or cloth bag, close the hole by moving the tip of the trier over the weave. If a paper bag, close the hole with a pressure-sensitive label or masking tape.
- 6.** Combine the seed in a plastic bag or other container large enough to hold all the subsamples.
- 7.** Mix the seed thoroughly to blend the subsamples. Collect enough seed to have a sufficient amount to analyze (computed in [Step 1—Determine how large a sample to collect](#) on [page 8](#)).
- 8.** If the seed is treated, wipe off the trier and then wash your hands, face, and arms with soap and water.

Proceed to [Analyzing the Samples Collected](#) on [page 11](#).

Analyzing the Samples Collected

It is very important to detect the presence of seed-borne pests, diseases, and contaminants.

Step 1—Examine your sample

Segregate any that are different from the imported seed, looking for not only contaminants but also disease on the imported seeds or the contaminants.

Step 2—Submit interceptions

Submit any suspicious material to the identifier, along with the information whether the seed is an Agricultural (A) seed or a Vegetable (V) seed.

Step 3—Decide whether to sample further

Additional sampling may be needed for certain contaminants in selected Federal Seed Act (FSA) covered seeds. If additional official samples are required, the APHIS–PPQ Botanist will explain the procedure, and may be able to assist, as needed.

Refer to Sections in the *Manual for Agricultural Clearance* for handling interceptions, completing EANs, recording inspections in AQAS, and any other procedures used to clear agricultural commodities.

Taking Action on U.S. Seed Returned

Use the table that follows for seed that originated in the United States but is being returned.

Table 8 U.S.-Returned Seed

| If the seed is: | And: | And the seed is: | Then: |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Agricultural or vegetable | You are convinced that the seed's origin ¹ is the U.S. or the seed was cleared in the U.S. ^{1,2} | → | INSPECT AND RELEASE |
| | You doubt that the seed's origin ¹ is the U.S. or that the seed was cleared in the U.S. | → | GO to Table 4 |
| Other than agricultural or vegetable | One of the following conditions is met: 1. The seed is accompanied by a Seed Export Label (CFIA Form 5309) or 2. You are convinced that the seed's origin ³ is the U.S. or 3. The seed was cleared in the U.S. ² | → | INSPECT AND RELEASE |
| | None of the above conditions apply | Not accompanied by either of the above forms | PROHIBIT ENTRY |

- 1 To establish proof of U.S. origin, the importer must provide the following documentation:
 - Export documents indicating the quantity of seed and number of containers, the date of exportation from the United States, the distinguishing marks on the containers at the time of exportation, and the name and address of the United States exporter; and
 - Document issued by a Customs or other government official of the country to which the seed was exported indicating that the seed was not admitted into the commerce of that country; and
 - Document issued by a Customs or other government official of the country to which the seed was exported indicating that the seed was not commingled with other seed after being exported to that country.
- 2 The U.S. Customs entry form must be stamped "I & R" and documentation of sale from a U.S. company to a Canadian company must be present.
- 3 A U.S.-issued Phytosanitary Certificate must be present.

