



International Seed Testing Association

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Proposal from the Netherlands to allow issuing of multiple certificates of the same status and value for one seed lot

This document contains a proposal from the Netherlands received by the Secretariat of the Association and endorsed by the ISTA Executive Committee to be submitted to the ISTA Ordinary Meeting 2010 for discussion with the nominated ISTA Designated Members voting on behalf of their respective Government.

It is submitted to all ISTA Designated Authorities, ISTA Members and ISTA Observer Organizations for information two months prior to the ISTA Ordinary Meeting 2010.

It will be discussed at the Ordinary Meeting 2010 to be held on Tuesday, June 22, 2010 at the Guerzenich Congress Centre, Cologne, Germany under Agenda point 14. *Any other business raised raised by a Member, of which notice in writing has been received by the Secretary General two months prior to the date of the meeting.*



PLANT RESEARCH INTERNATIONAL
WAGENINGEN UR

ISTA Executive Committee
Dr Michael Muschick, Secretary General
International Seed Testing Association
Zürichstrasse 50
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**Agrosystems
Research**

DATE
1 February 2010

SUBJECT
Certificates for sublots

HANDLED BY
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Dear Dr Muschick,

the Netherlands would like to put forward a proposal for consideration by the next Ordinary Meeting of ISTA, June 2010. The proposal is to allow issuing of multiple certificates of the same status and value for one seed lot. The proposal is outlined in the following text.

Introduction

The current ISTA Rules prescribe that seed lots are subject to a maximum size and that only one Orange International Seed Lot Certificate (OIC) marked 'ORIGINAL' may be issued with reference to the whole lot. This means that if parts of such lots are to be sold separately, the ISTA system does not address this; with the result that trade is hampered. Often this problem is circumvented by issuing national certificates for such parts of lots, or duplicate OICs. This is an undesirable situation, for the seed trade as well as for ISTA, and it is suggested that the issue will be addressed by ISTA.

Why only one original certificate?

The philosophy of seed lots with a maximum size is based on the idea that homogeneity of larger lots cannot be guaranteed. Upon request of the seed trade, and based on practical experience rather than scientific evidence, ISTA has regularly increased seed lot sizes. It has proven very difficult to gather data on heterogeneity of lots mainly due to the prohibitive costs of heterogeneity testing. In order to meet the uniformity requirements many companies have invested in modern large-scale blending and mixing equipment.

So for the present lot sizes one may assume that they guarantee sufficient homogeneity. Besides, if there is any sign of heterogeneity, the sampler must refuse to sample the seed lot for the issue of an ISTA certificate and the company has to try and homogenise the lot.

At some point in time, in the past far beyond our recollection, ISTA decided on the principle of one lot – one submitted sample – one certificate. We understand the one lot – one submitted sample principle, but it is not clear why only one certificate should be issued.

Why change the concept of one original certificate?

In practice seed lots are usually prepared in larger amounts than strictly needed for trade. For instance, grass seed is almost always prepared in quantities of 10 t, but many lots are sold in parts. For vegetable and flower seeds, the quantities prepared and

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traded usually differ greatly. (It is also apparent that quantities larger than the maximum seed lot size are prepared and have to be split in lots of the maximum size prescribed by ISTA. We will not discuss that here).

In grass seed production, like in many other crops, it is efficient to process one farmer's production in its entirety, resulting in a lot which may not amount to 10 t, but nevertheless will usually still be too large for an individual customer.

So for operational reasons, lots are usually larger than needed for trade to individual customers. ISTA requires treating the parts traded as separate lots and to sample and test them separately. As a consequence costs become a problem and the extra time needed for the sampling and testing would frustrate trade deals. ISTA requirements are therefore seldom followed.



Possible objections

The argument has been raised that seed lots at present show a certain range of heterogeneity, and that the present seed lot certificate represents the average value of all parts in the lot. This is very true. When one takes out a certain fraction of such a lot, it may well be that the average value of this part of the lot will deviate from the average of the whole lot. However, such deviation will only accidentally be larger than the tolerated range for that quality. Similarly, re-tests are rarely out of tolerance, except when something has happened to the lot, for instance during transport. The latter is not the case here, because the lot (and its parts) are all handled at the same premises. Buyers of seed lots should realise that they are dealing with natural material. This means that test results are based on samples and that they represent the nearest best estimate. This also means that the quality between individual bags may slightly differ. One simply cannot test entire lots, and some variation and deviation from the mean must be accepted.

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The solution

In conclusion, we can therefore say that if a lot has been tested once according the ISTA Rules, there is no scientific objection against providing more than one certificate per lot. It will perhaps be desirable to specify which part of the lot is covered by a certificate. This could be done by mentioning label numbers on the certificate, but has the disadvantage of additional administration.

The value of the ISTA certificate as reliable document in the seed trade and as bank collateral should of course remain intact.

We would like to hear from you the necessary steps that we have to take, if any, to guarantee a fruitful discussion on the subject, eventually leading to a vote.

With kind regards,

W. Joost van der Burg
ISTA Coordinator for the Netherlands