



How to Read a Label on a Bag of Hemp Seed

By Pat T. Miller, Director State Affairs, American Seed Trade Association

Before purchasing a bag of any seed, it is important to know what's inside. Luckily, that work is done for you by a variety of entities. While all 50 states and the federal government have different laws related to seed labeling, they all have relatively similar requirements. Truth-in-labeling is the primary rule for all consumer packaging, but seed labeling goes quite a bit further. These seed laws are designed to protect the grower, but they also ensure plant breeders' rights, encourage biodiversity, and ultimately greater opportunity for financial success by the grower community.

When you look at a label, you'll see a lot of information. However, upon closer examination it's fairly organized. Here's an overview (depending on an individual state law, some items may not be listed – although all are important to know when making a purchase):

- **Product name:** the brand name and/or species name, so the consumer knows what they are getting
- **Pure seed:** percentage by weight of the desired seed(s) based on the entire contents of the bag
- **Other crops seed:** percentage by weight of seeds not considered weeds. If the amount is over 5% (generally) then those species are considered “pure seed” and are to be listed by name. In some cases those species present at 5% or less may also be listed as “pure seed” if so desired by the seller.
- **Weed seed:** the percentage by weight of weed seeds unless they are considered restricted noxious weed seeds by law where the seed will be sold. If they are restricted noxious weed seeds, then they must be listed individually by name and are limited to the amount in the state law (usually around 0.25%). (NOTE: Prohibited noxious weed seeds are not allowed at all.)
- **Inert matter:** the percentage by weight of whatever is in the package that doesn't grow (i.e. broken seed that are half or less what was originally there, seed coats, insects, etc.).
- **Address:** the contact information for the company providing the seed
- **Origin:** location where the seed was grown
- **Lot number:** a unique number so that the seed can be traced to its origin
- **Test date:** month and date that this lot was tested. The date of the standard germination test must be listed, even if it is different from the dates of other tests done.
- **Germination:** the percentage of seed in the bag that is expected to grow (based on a lab test)
- **Treatment:** coatings generally used to enhance germination, protect the seed, or assist in growth
- **Dormancy:** means viable seed which may fail to germinate until specific germination conditions exist, which is possible in hemp seed, depending on breeding history. It is possible to force a hemp seed out of dormancy with specific applications; such as stratification (temperature), scarification (seed coat penetration), or exposure to water or light.
- **Viability:** equals the sum of percentage germination plus dormant seeds
- **Other items:** any other items deemed necessary by the state, as this list is not all-inclusive.

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The information on a seed label should be backed up by a test from a seed lab. In the United States, Registered Seed Technologists (RST) examine the seed using standards set by the Association of Official Seed Analysts (AOSA). These RST's must show evidence of continuing education and proficiency testing to continue their certification. It is worth noting that growing environments vary in soil type, fertility, fungal & insect population, environmental conditions, etc. Thus, the germination percentage may or may not match field emergence.

When seeking hemp seed, the term "Certified Seed" may be used. Some states allow only seed certified according to AOSCA Standards in the production of hemp crops. Obviously, the purpose for the final product is a major consideration when buying hemp seed, since hemp can be grown for oil, fiber, food, or feed. That's where using AOSCA Certified seed can assist. AOSCA Certification will ensure varietal purity. However, it is important to realize that this Certification will not verify levels of CBD or THC. In fact, there is not a seed test to determine these levels. The only way to make that determination is through a grow-out of the seed.

A bag of AOSCA Certified seed will have an additional tag, also known as a "blue tag." That tag denotes that it has been certified for genetic purity and varietal identity. Seed Certification standards are established by the Association of Official Seed Certifying Agencies (AOSCA) and administered at the local level by seed certifying agencies. The end-goal is to enable seed companies to produce and market genetically pure seed. Requirements for producing AOSCA Certified seed include special land requirements, planting eligible stock, field inspections, proper seed labeling, and meeting standards based on complete lab analysis. By purchasing AOSCA Certified seed, you are assured of coordinated, professional and unbiased field inspections and laboratory testing. Seed buyers have assurance that the designated seed has met purity standards related to a known description across seed lots and years of production.

Seed labels ensure you are buying what you expect, and therefore assist in the production of a viable and profitable crop. The most important step in hemp production is to study the label before you buy and plant. All it takes is a moment to ensure your hemp crop is successful.

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