

Searching for Organic Seeds

Whether you are an organic farmer or organic gardener, now is a good time to order organic seeds for next year's crops.

The National Organic Program regulation, at 7 CFR Section 205.204(a), requires organic producers to use organically grown seeds, unless there is no 'equivalent' organic variety that is 'commercially available' in the form, quality, and quantity that you need for your operation.

In approving a grower's organic system plan for certification, the Accredited Certifying Agent must decide whether the producer has made a sufficient effort to source organic seeds for all crops grown on the farm, including cover crops. Generally, producers need to check with at least three suppliers of organic seeds to see if they have organic seeds in the varieties that the producer needs. (Records should be kept of all attempts to source organic seeds.)

Fortunately, more and more varieties of organic seeds are becoming available. There are several helpful web sites where suppliers of organic seeds, and the varieties they sell, are listed.

The Organic Materials Review Institute has established an excellent database so that growers can find organic seed varieties that are 'equivalent' and 'commercially available.' The database can be accessed at: <http://seeds.omri.org/>

An organic seed search service is now provided by the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association's Save Our Seed Project (<http://www.savingourseed.org>). The SOS Project provides certified organic growers access to organically grown seeds, tubers, and rootstocks. You can even receive customized information by submitting a list of the cultivars/varieties sought, along with the quantities needed, by FAX (540-894-8060), e-mail (cricket@savingourseed.org), or mail (Carolina Farm Stewardship Ass'n, 286 Dixie Hollow, Louisa, VA 23093). If no certified organic sources exist, the project will send full documentation for you to provide to your certification agent. The web site is: <http://www.savingourseed.org/>

The Appropriate Technology Transfer to Rural Areas (ATTRA) project has a publication entitled "Suppliers of Seed for Certified Organic Production." The purpose of the publication is to help U.S. farmers find quality organic seeds of regionally suitable varieties. The list includes suppliers of organic seeds for horticultural and agronomic crops. For more information, visit: http://www2.attra.ncat.org/where.php/altseed_search.php.

Other sources of organic seeds may be found at the Washington State University organic program seed database (<http://csanr.wsu.edu/Organic/OrganicSeed.htm>).