Have you ever wondered why it is recommended to purchase certified seed? Really, what is the purpose of that blue tag that says “certified seed” sewn on the seed bag you are wanting to buy? Why is that label so important? As a farmer, rancher or frequent buyer of seed, these are all great questions to ask. So, let us get down to business and try to address these questions. After all, seeds are a basic and critical input for many agricultural enterprises to enhance their operational productivity.

WHAT IS SEED CERTIFICATION?
Seed certification is an internationally recognized system to preserve the genetic identity and purity of crop varieties.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF SEED CERTIFICATION?
The purpose of seed certification is to maintain and make available to the public, high quality seed and propagating materials of adapted superior crop varieties grown and distributed to ensure varietal identity and purity. Seed certification is based on the premise that proper identification of crop varieties is essential to everyone who handles seed — from the breeder, commercial grower, seed cleaner, and seed distributor, to the farmer or rancher who purchases the seed.

SEED CERTIFICATION IS BASED ON THE PREMISE THAT PROPER IDENTIFICATION OF CROP VARIETIES IS ESSENTIAL TO EVERYONE WHO HANDLES SEED.
WHAT IS THE IMPORTANCE OF SEED CERTIFICATION?
Certified seed is the starting point to a successful crop. In the early days of crop improvement, most varieties had easily identifiable phenotypic (visible) traits. At present, most varieties are a synthesis of many complex genotypic characteristics, many of which are not necessarily visible. It is also important to remember that certified seeds are the outcome of many years of research and development for improved traits, such as herbicide tolerance, resistance to pests or improved grazing tolerance. Thus, seed certification through field and laboratory inspections, along with continuous pedigree records, provides the most practical and reliable method of verifying genetic identity and purity for the improved varieties commercially available.

HOW IS SEED CERTIFIED?
Seed certification requires planting eligible seed stocks, field inspection of the growing crop, proper conditioning or cleaning, representative sampling, thorough laboratory analysis, and proper labeling. Certification involves the inspection of the crop in the field as well as samples of the harvested seed. If seed of a variety is produced in separate fields, each field, or “lot,” is considered independently for acceptance or rejection for certification. The field and seed inspections from each unit or lot are made by employees of the certifying agency, such as your state crop commission. The requirements that must be met for certification, such as purity or germination percentage, differ for each crop and from state to state.

WHY BUY CERTIFIED SEED?
Good crop production begins with planting high quality seed, and seed certification procedures provide the best possible third-party assurance of good quality seed. As previously stated, standards may vary from crop to crop and from state to state, but remember, a certification tag on a bag of seed is the symbol of quality. It assures you, the purchaser, that the seed inside the bag is the variety stated and it has met the required standards for germination and purity by the inspecting agency.

TWO MORE REASONS FOR PURCHASING CERTIFIED SEED

CLEAN SEED

1. Strict production standards ensure a high purity with minimal weed seeds and other contaminants.

TRACEABILITY

2. Traceability is an important consideration in today’s agricultural environment. You can only be sure of your product if you know of its origins. Using certified seed will provide you with this traceability.

WHAT ARE CERTIFICATION CLASSES?
The classes of seed in the certification programs of the United States are breeder, foundation, registered and certified. Each class of certified seed is associated with a colored seed tag. Since breeders’ seed is not available to the public, a tag is not shown for the class. Certified seed tags are blue, registered are purple and foundation tags are white. The certification class refers to the number of generations away from the original variety that was developed by the plant breeder. Breeder, the first class, is seed provided by the breeder of the new plant variety and is of the highest class of genetic purity and quality. Foundation is the second class and one generation removed (the progeny of the breeder seed). Registered is the progeny of foundation seed and two generations removed from the breeder class. Foundation and registered seed are also of premium quality, intended for commercial seed increases, and are not necessarily available for the public to purchase. The final class of seed is certified, and it may be the progeny of registered or foundation seed. Certified, or blue tagged, is generally the class of seed available to farmers for purchasing. For certification to be valid, buyers must be provided proof of certification.