

Draft Seeds Bill to replace the Seeds Act, 1966

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The Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare has released the draft Seeds Bill, 2019. The draft Bill seeks to regulate the quality of seeds during their production, distribution, sale, import, and export. The proposed bill seeks to replace the Seeds Act, 1966

Key features of the draft bill

Registration:

- **All varieties of seeds being sold for the purpose of sowing or planting must be registered, except farmers' varieties.**
- **Farmers' varieties are varieties** which have been **traditionally cultivated** and evolved by the farmers in their fields or are similar to varieties about which farmers have common knowledge.
- Seeds produced by farmers, other than those for sale under a brand name, are also not required to be registered.
- **Transgenic varieties of seeds** (which are developed by modifying the genetic composition of other varieties) can be registered only after applicants obtain a clearance under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.

Standards by the central government

- The central government may notify minimum limits of germination, genetic and physical purity, and seed health for any seed variety.
- Additional standards may be specified for transgenic varieties.
- **These standards will not apply to seeds produced by farmers**, other than those for sale under a brand name.

Compensation to farmers:

- **If a registered variety of seed fails to perform to expected standards** (as disclosed by the producer, distributor, or vendor), the **farmer can claim compensation from the producer, dealer, distributor or vendor** under the Consumer Protection Act, 1986.

Offences and penalties:

- Persons who contravene any provision of the Bill and sell seeds which do not conform to the specified standards will be punished with a fine between Rs 25,000 and one lakh rupees.
- Persons furnishing false information regarding standards, misbrand seeds, or supplying seeds which are spurious or not registered, will be punished with up to one-year imprisonment, or with a fine of up to five lakh rupees, or both.