

# 'BREEDERS TRUST' MONITORS THE SEED MARKET

Quality seed – what does that actually mean? Basically, the customer relies on the fact that the variety he buys is actually in the packaging and fulfils the described qualities. But who controls this on the European seed market? Since 2008, the 'Breeders Trust' organisation in the EU has ensured that the trade in protected seeds takes place within the legal framework.

Plant breeding is a costly and time-consuming process. Breeding progress in new varieties secures the agricultural harvest and creates solutions for special applications: For example, outstanding grass seed for a pasture, a football pitch or a lawn. It is not uncommon for 15 years to pass before a new grass variety is on the market (source: ‚Die Pflanzenzüchter‘). The expenditure of the research companies must be secured in order to have adapted varieties available in the future.

There is a lot of seed to buy and the customer must be able to be sure that the seed in the bag is actually the variety indicated on the label. The quality of the seed must also be guaranteed.

In 2008, plant breeding companies founded 'Breeders Trust' in order to achieve greater security and at the same time defend the 'Plant Breeders' Rights' (PBR).

## Against illegal seed practices

Fair seed trade is crucial for a healthy and innovative seed sector. The plant breeders and seed companies organised in 'Breeders Trust' work intensively on the challenges of tomorrow and invest large sums in their research work. 'Breeders Trust' has set itself the task of raising awareness of illegal seed practices among seed traders and authorities in order to protect its members.

## Is the seed true to variety and species?

'Breeders Trust' buys seeds throughout Europe to check whether the seeds are true to the variety and species. This seed is then tested on trial and control farms, such as the Federal Plant Variety Office in Germany. 'Breeders Trust' receives an official test report. If the result is: ‚not true to variety and species‘, the participating company that supplied the seeds is contacted by the retailer. The company in question is then given the opportunity to comment. If possible, an agreement or settlement is reached, depending on the facts of the case. However, if necessary, 'Breeders Trust' will take further action, for example in court. This may be the case if a seed company has repeatedly and knowingly sold seed

that is demonstrably not true to the variety and species. Published at the end of the process 'Breeders Trust' issues a press release on each case to inform the seed industry and raise awareness to sharpen the focus on variety authenticity and seed quality within the industry. Further publication of articles in newspapers and on the Internet or the dissemination of information through presentations at congresses are examples of the wide-ranging activities of 'Breeders Trust'.

## Diagnosis ‚Not true to variety‘: What happens then?

Ten years ago, the main focus was on the Italian market. Enforcement of seed regulations in Italy was inadequate and some local seed companies were abusing the situation

## EXAMPLE 1: POST-CONTROL CULTIVATION OF AN ITALIAN RYEGRASS VARIETY (*LOLIUM MULTIFLORUM*)



to their own advantage. 'Breeders Trust' became active and purchased grass seed, perennial ryegrass (*Lolium multiflorum*). The tests increasingly showed: not true to variety and species. An agreement with the Italian authorities led to a better functioning enforcement system. In the meantime, the buyer of Italian seeds can rely on the labels much more than ten years ago.

Another case: In recent years, activities in Poland have increasingly come to the focus. 'Breeders Trust' bought grass seed (1 kg) very cheaply on the Polish market. This seed contained up to 25 % sand! In addition, 'Breeders Trust' has taken into focus clover, mustard and fodder radish seeds from Polish production. Here, more and more counterfeit labels were discovered and reported to the responsible authorities.

### Structural improvement of seed quality for prevention

Awareness raising is one of the keys to combating illegal seed practices. In this context, 'Breeders Trust' advises seed companies to regularly check stored seed in order to guarantee high quality and varietal authenticity.

### Conclusion

'Breeders Trust' was founded to monitor compliance with Plant Breeders' Rights (PBR) and to create transparency in the seed market. 'Breeders Trust' regularly communicates publicly to denounce violations of PBRs and illegal production, trade and use, but also



### 'BREEDERS TRUST' – THE ORGANISATION

BREEDERS TRUST

'Breeders Trust' was founded in 2008 by European seed potato breeders to ensure the enforcement of plant breeders' rights and to combat illegal production. In 2012, additional 6 European seed potato breeders joined 'Breeders Trust', significantly expanding the scope of activities. These companies refine, produce and trade in grass seeds and other green fodder and green fertiliser plants. Currently, 21 internationally active breeding and seed trading companies belong to the 'Breeders Trust'. The idea behind is, that breeders can jointly take action against unfair production and business practices that are practised by globally operating companies and that discredit the good reputation of the entire seed sector. The Breeders Trust office is located in Brussels (Belgium).

Source: <https://www.breederstrust.eu/de/>

The main activities of 'Breeders Trust' are:

- Investigation of violations of 'Plant Breeders' Rights' (PBR)
- Pursuing evidence of illegal seed practices
- Collection of licence fees for 'Farm Saved Seeds' (FSS seed potatoes) in Belgium
- Monitoring the varietal identity of grasses sold in the EU



to inform about the importance of certified source material. Knowing what is going wrong can be a starting point for an optimised production and certification system. So that the farmer ultimately receives the quality seed that he has ordered.

Deutsche Saatveredelung AG (DSV), for example, shows how this can work by integrating all functional areas of the company into a holistic quality assurance system with high production standards. This efficient quality management system is called 'Integrated Quality (IQ)'.

### EXAMPLE 2: POST-CONTROL CULTIVATION OF FODDER RADISH



Tested seed sample

Significantly more flowers than the reference



Comparison seed sample

Less flowers in the reference seed

**Result:**  
not true to  
variety and  
species

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