



Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas

# Suppliers of Seed for Certified Organic Production

(Including Untreated and Non-GMO Seed)  
Horticulture Resource List

## Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas (ATTRA)

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**Summary:** *The purpose of this publication is to help U.S. farmers find quality organic seed of regionally suitable varieties. The following list, originally a listing of small alternative seed companies offering open-pollinated, heirloom vegetable seed, has expanded over the years to include suppliers of seed for agronomic crops—with a recent focus on sources of seed certified organic or otherwise acceptable in accordance with the 2002 National Organic Program regulations.*

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## Introduction

Since implementation of the National Organic Rule went into effect October 21, 2002, farmers have been required to use organic seed for organic crops—unless that seed is "not commercially available" for a given crop. This regulation is open to interpretation. For example, State of Montana Organic Certification Program Manager Doug Crabtree writes:

*Please note that you do NOT have to purchase organic seed IF it is not commercially available in appropriate form, quality, quantity or variety to fit your Organic Production System Plan. For instance, you do not have to buy organic wheat seed in 1 oz. packets to plant 500 acres if that is the only quantity in which it is available. You do not have to buy organic sprouting alfalfa seed for your hay field if that is the only form in which it is available. You do not have to buy dirty, low-germination or non-certified organic seeds if that is the only quality available. Whatever the reason for not using organic seed, you (the producer) must document what the reason(s) are and that you did search for organic seed before using non-organic. (1)*

Farmers should first contact their certifying agency or state department of agriculture to find out if these agencies can supply lists of seed sources for organic production of their region's leading crops. Not all states have organic certification programs.

The [Organic Materials Review Institute \(OMRI\)](#) publishes a list of sources of organic seed on its regularly updated website. Seed companies meeting OMRI requirements may be listed for a fee. Membership in OMRI is not required to view this list. As of October 20, 2002, OMRI requires all seed companies listed to have a certificate of organic certification on file, in compliance with the requirements of the Final Organic Rule.

This is not a complete listing of all seed suppliers. There are many types of seed suppliers. The emphasis in this publication is on national companies, especially mail order. NCAT is not aware of all local or regional seed suppliers. Most suppliers specialize in one of the broad seed categories—agronomic or horticultural—and the following categories reflect that. NCAT has not inspected the certificates of any company listed herein or their certifiers, nor does the following listing make or imply any claims about the trustworthiness or business practices of any company. No matter what the source, seed buyers need to ask pertinent questions and study the label (especially for bulk seed). Organic producers are strongly encouraged to ask first for organic seed and to demand a label with percentage of pure live seed.

Principally for agronomic crops, certified seed (as distinguished from certified organic) must meet minimum standards for germination, cleanliness, and labeling. Bin-run seed, bought locally from farmers, requires extra caution—even though it may have been organically produced. Organic farmers are well advised to learn techniques of seed-saving and seed production. A series of workshops on these topics are planned for 2004 in parts of the Pacific Northwest, a traditional area for seed production. Other workshops are being held in the Northeast. Contact the Organic Seed Alliance (See [Table 3](#) below) for more information.

The seed buyer needs to ask to see his supplier's documentation. Ask: Is this seed organic? Certified by whom? If not, is it untreated; is it GMO-free? Is it pre-inoculated (in the case of legumes), and if so, is the inoculant GMO-free? The farmer **must** get a copy of the inoculant label to verify that it is GMO-free. What is the percentage of pure live seed? What is the percentage of contamination?

Please note that [Table 1](#) (Agronomic) includes a wide range of suppliers—not just certified organic handlers or suppliers. [Table 2](#) includes suppliers of organic seed for horticultural crops. [Table 3](#) is

our traditional listing of small, alternative seed suppliers specializing in untreated, non-GMO seed for open-pollinated and heirloom vegetable varieties.

### **Organic Certification addresses a process**

It is important to recognize that organic certification addresses the *process* involved in producing and handling a product. Organic certification assures the consumer that the product was grown using organic methods, that synthetic pesticides, fertilizers, and genetically engineered organisms were not used in production, and that pains were taken to prevent contamination from the outside. The organic process does not guarantee that the product is completely free of all pesticide residues or GMO contamination. Only a lab test can do that. (The vast proliferation of pesticides and GE crops precludes virtually everyone from making such a claim.)

Organic certification also does not ensure that the products are nutritionally superior. However, organic farmers and consumers firmly believe that organic food and feed is healthier, and that organic production is better for the environment. Furthermore, organic farming brings important social and economic benefits. Lower production costs and organic premiums give farmers more equitable returns to their labor and management. By making smaller farms more economically viable, organic farming helps preserve family farms and rural communities.

#### **What the New Rule Says**

- a) The producer must use organically grown seeds, annual seedlings, and planting stock, Except, That,
- (1) Nonorganically produced, untreated seeds and planting stock may be used to produce an organic crop when an equivalent organically produced variety is not commercially available, Except, That, organically produced seed must be used for the production of edible sprouts;
  - (2) Nonorganically produced seeds and planting stock that have been treated with a substance included on the National List of synthetic substances allowed for use in organic crop production may be used to produce an organic crop when an equivalent organically produced or untreated variety is not commercially available.
  - (3) Nonorganically produced annual seedlings may be used to produce an organic crop when a temporary variance has been granted in accordance with § 205.290(a)(2);
  - (4) Nonorganically produced planting stock to be used to produce a perennial crop may be sold, labeled, or represented as organically produced only after the planting stock has been maintained under a system of organic management for a period of no less than 1 year; and
  - (5) Seeds, annual seedlings, and planting stock treated with prohibited substances may be used to produce an organic crop when the application of the materials is a requirement of Federal or State phytosanitary regulations.

—National Organic Rule §205.204 Seeds and planting stock practice standard.  
<http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop/>

A list of certifier applicants, as well as the status of their applications, can be viewed at The National Organic Program website <<http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop/>>. Complete text of the Final Rule can also be found at that site.

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## Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs)

The National Organic Program Final Rule does not allow the use of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs), including genetically engineered crops.

If you are growing certified organic crops in 2002 and planning to save seed for next year's planting, some precautions need to be taken in regard to GMOs. There is always a chance of stray GMO material being brought in on pollen, or mixed in during harvest, transit, and storage of your crop. Organic Inspector Jim Riddle has compiled the following suggestions to minimize GMO contamination of organic farm products. (Other issues pertaining to organic seed production are addressed in the Organic Crops Checklist, available from ATTRA in late spring 2002.)

1. **Know your seeds.** Prior to planting, verify that non-GMO seeds will be used. Obtain statements from seed companies concerning the non-GMO status of the varieties to be planted. Have seeds tested [especially if you are saving your own seed] for all applicable GMO "events." Retain copies of test results and letters from seed suppliers.
2. **Know your farm.** Know your fields and determine which have the lowest risk of GMO contamination. Select isolated fields for wind and/or insect pollinated crops (corn, canola, etc.). Know the prevailing wind direction. Establish physical buffers, such as windbreaks and hedgerows.
3. **Know your neighbors.** Establish good lines of communication with neighbors, especially those who directly adjoin organic fields. Notify them that you are an organic farmer, and where your organic fields are located. Get to know farmers who farm adjoining fields, even if they rent the land. Post "Organic Farm" signs along field margins, where needed.
4. **Know your neighbors' crops.** Gather information from neighbors, seed dealers, and farm input suppliers on the types of crops being grown in the vicinity. Know which GMO events are being planted. If neighbors are growing Bt crops, ask them to plant their "20% non-Bt refuges" in areas that adjoin organic fields, to provide some buffer protection. If possible, delay your planting dates so that your organic crops do not pollinate at the same time as GMO crops.
5. **Know your equipment.** Know what your equipment is used for. This includes rented and borrowed equipment and

equipment used by custom operators. Know how to clean all pieces of equipment, including planters, combines, wagons, trucks, etc. Clean equipment prior to use in organic fields, and keep records to document your equipment cleaning activities.

6. **Know your harvest.** Submit samples prior to harvest for GMO testing. If contamination is likely, collect samples along a grid pattern, going from areas with the highest risk to areas with low risk. Submit the samples separately, in case part, but not all, of the field is contaminated. Make sure samples are tested for all applicable GMO events. Keep copies of test results.
7. **Know your crop storage.** Carefully inspect storage units prior to use. Dust from GMO crops can contaminate organic crops. Thoroughly clean augers, bins, grain dryers, rotary screen cleaners, etc.—especially if they might have previously been used for GMO crops.
8. **Know your truckers.** Carefully inspect and clean trucks and trailers prior to loading with organic grain. Make sure that transport units, including overseas shipping containers, are free of grain, dust, and other foreign material. Keep records to document, including clean transportation affidavits and bills of lading.
9. **Know your records.** Document your efforts to minimize GMO contamination. With good records, you will have a better chance of limiting losses, identifying causes of problems, and determining liability. Valid records of organic yields and sales may help establish claims for losses, should contamination occur.
10. **Know your buyers.** Know the contract specifications under which the organic crop is being grown. Know your buyer's sampling and testing protocols. Know the market-driven GMO rejection levels (tolerances) for the crops grown. Communicate with buyers and organic certifying agents concerning GMO contamination issues.

—*Jim Riddle (used by permission)*

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## Additional Resources

Lindholm, Nicholas. 2000–2002. Organic Seed Crop Production in the Northeast [Overview, series of articles]. Maine Organic Farmer & Gardener.

September–November, 2000. Research overview.

December–February, 2000. Tomatoes.  
 March–May, 2001. Cucurbits. p. 30–32.  
 June–August, 2001. Lettuce. p. 26–28.  
 September–November, 2001. Beans/Peas.  
 December–February, 2001. Brassicas.  
 March–May, 2002. Flowers. p. 31–33.

### Related NCAT/ATTRA Publications

[\*Suppliers of Plugs for Medicinal Herb Crops\*](#)  
[\*Organic Plug and Transplant Production\*](#)  
[\*Genetic Engineering of Crop Plants\*](#)  
[\*Organic and Sustainable Practices: Workbook for Cropping Systems\*](#)

### Table 1. Suppliers of Seed for Agronomic Crops.

**Note:** It is wise to contact your seed supplier more than a year in advance of planting to contract for organic seed production and delivery.

**Agassiz Seed & Supply**  
 445 7th Street NW  
 West Fargo, ND 58078  
 701-282-8118

**Order:** phone, pick up  
**Quantity:** wholesale  
**Notes:** Grains.

**Albert Lea Seed House**  
 1414 West Main Street  
 P.O. Box 127  
 Albert Lea, MN 56007  
 800-352-5247  
 Fax: 507-373-7032  
 e-mail: [mac@alseed.com](mailto:mac@alseed.com)  
<http://www.alseed.com/>

**Order:** mail, phone, website  
**Catalog:** print, website  
**Quantity:** wholesale  
**Notes:** Now an NC+ Organics dealer.

**Big Sky Wholesale Seeds, Inc.**  
 Box 852  
 Shelby, MT 59474  
 406-434-5011  
 e-mail:  
[seeds@bigskyseeds.com](mailto:seeds@bigskyseeds.com)

**Order:** e-mail  
**Quantity:** wholesale  
**Notes:** Alfalfa, clovers.

<p><b>Blaine's Best Seeds</b> 6020 22nd Avenue Rugby, ND 58368 701-776-6023 (phone/fax) 701-208-0061 (cell)</p>	<p><b>Order:</b> mail, phone <b>Catalog:</b> print <b>Quantity:</b> wholesale <b>Notes:</b> Certified by FVO-International Certification Services. Small grains, dry beans, and legume crops (no corn, no soybeans). Certified GMO-free, also.</p>
<p><b>Brown Seed Farms, Inc.</b> N1279 530th Street P.O. Box 7 Bay City, WI 54723 e-mail: <a href="mailto:info@brownseed.com">mailto:info@brownseed.com</a> <a href="http://www.brownseed.com/">http://www.brownseed.com/</a></p>	<p><b>Order:</b> e-mail, on-line <b>Quantity:</b> wholesale <b>Notes:</b> Corn, alfalfa.</p>
<p><b>Buckwheat Growers Association of Minnesota</b> 20415 County Road 2 Aldrich, MN 56434 218-445-5475 Fax: 218-445-5673 e-mail: <a href="mailto:deebilek@wcta.net">deebilek@wcta.net</a> <a href="http://www.buckwheatgrowers.com/">http://www.buckwheatgrowers.com/</a></p>	<p><b>Order:</b> phone, e-mail (buyer picks up or arranges shipping) <b>Catalog:</b> website <b>Quantity:</b> wholesale seed and feed <b>Notes:</b> Buckwheat, winter rye, red clover and hairy vetch certified organic by OCIA International. Also handles untreated, non-GMO seed (above types, plus hull-less and other oats, Legend brand seed for corn and soybeans). Farmer-owned and operated cooperative.</p>
<p><b>Christie Farms</b> 38165 Richardson Gap Road Scio, OR 97374-9756 503-394-3192 Fax: 503-394-2631 <a href="http://www.bigtrefoil.com/">http://www.bigtrefoil.com/</a></p>	<p><b>Order:</b> on-line <b>Quantity:</b> retail or wholesale <b>Notes:</b> Open-pollinated trefoil.</p>
<p><b>Earthwise Processors LLC.</b> Moorhead, MN 56560 218-287-5510 e-mail: <a href="mailto:info@earthwisepro.com">info@earthwisepro.com</a> <a href="http://www.earthwisepro.com/ProductList.htm">http://www.earthwisepro.com/ProductList.htm</a></p>	<p><b>Order:</b> on-line <b>Catalog:</b> on-line <b>Notes:</b> Soybeans, corn, small grains, oilseeds, legumes.</p>

**Goerger Farms, Inc.**  
15910 81 R. Street SE  
Wyndmere, ND 58081  
701-439-2875

**Order:** phone, pick up

**Notes:** Corn.

**Great Harvest Organics**  
6803 E. 276th St.  
Atlanta, IN 46031  
Contact: Dave Booher  
317-984-6