

SUBMISSION

SUBMISSION ON

Amendments to the Import Health Standard for Seeds for Sowing (155.02.05)

27 July 2022

To: The Ministry for Primary Industries

Name of Submitter: Horticulture New Zealand

Contact for Service:

Anna Rathé

Strategy and Policy Risk Team Leader

Horticulture New Zealand

PO Box 10-232 WELLINGTON

Email: anna.rathe@hortnz.co.nz

OVERVIEW

Submission structure

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Our submission

Horticulture New Zealand (HortNZ) thanks the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) for the opportunity to submit on the draft amendments to the Import Health Standard for Seeds for Sowing (155.02.05) and welcomes any opportunity to continue to work with MPI and to discuss our submission.

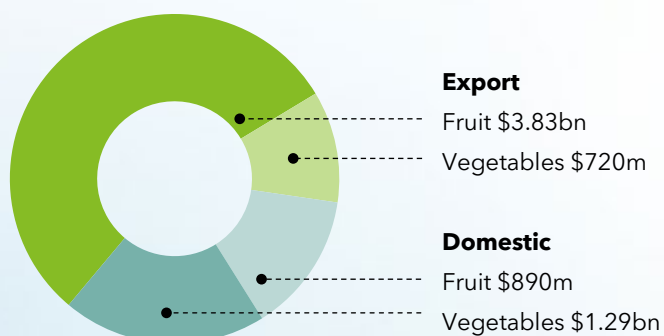
This submission is being made by Horticulture New Zealand and is supported by the following organisations:

- New Zealand Asparagus Council
- Process Vegetables New Zealand
- Pukekohe Vegetable Grower Association
- Tomatoes New Zealand
- Vegetables New Zealand Inc

HortNZ's Role

Background to HortNZ

- Horticulture New Zealand (HortNZ) advocates for and represents the interests of New Zealand's 6,000 commercial fruit and vegetable growers. The horticulture industry annual value is \$6.73b, including \$4.55b from export revenue.
- The industry employs over 60,000 people, occupies some 80,000 ha of land and provides critical regional development opportunities in Northland, Auckland, Bay of Plenty, Waikato, Hawke's Bay, Gisborne, Manawatu, Marlborough, Nelson, Canterbury, and Central Otago.
- New Zealand growers supply fresh and processed fruit and vegetables to domestic consumers, as well as exporting crops to consumers overseas.
- HortNZ's purpose is to create an enduring environment where growers can thrive. This is done through enabling, promoting and advocating for growers in New Zealand.



Industry value \$6.73bn

Total exports \$4.55bn

Total domestic \$2.18bn

HortNZ's Biosecurity Involvement

- Biosecurity is essential to support production, secure market access, and provide confidence for investment – all critical to ensure the horticulture industry continues to prosper.
- On behalf of its grower members, HortNZ takes a significant interest in biosecurity regulations, planning and operations. As well as advocating on behalf of growers in discussions with MPI and other regulators, HortNZ and other industry groups work to raise the awareness of our grower members about the role they themselves can play in helping to keep their farms, orchards, and wider New Zealand protected from unwanted pests and diseases.



Submission

General

1. Access to imported seed is critical to grow vegetables for domestic consumption and export, as well as being necessary to sustain and grow the vegetable seed industry in New Zealand.
2. It is important that seed is able to come into the country from offshore suppliers, but it is equally important that the imported seed is not inadvertently bringing unwanted pests or pathogens with it. We must have confidence that the seed is clean.
3. HortNZ notes that seeds have historically been a pathway for spread of pathogens to new countries. It is important that the seed pathway is well managed to avoid the arrival of new viruses, bacteria and fungi that may harm the horticulture sector.
4. While HortNZ is supportive of some of the proposed changes, we have concerns about others.
5. In particular, we are concerned about the proposal to allow unvalidated tests to be used as a pre-export screen for seeds originating in countries where an unwanted disease is prevalent. HortNZ urges MPI to consider using validated tests on samples taken from the mother plants instead of relying solely on unvalidated tests of the seeds.
6. HortNZ is also mindful that a lack of scientific evidence that a disease is either seed borne or seed transmitted does not necessarily mean that seeds do not carry or transmit that disease. We encourage MPI to apply microbiological knowledge of each individual disease to estimate the likelihood of seeds carrying it, rather than assuming that a lack of specific experiments means seed borne disease and transmission do not occur.
7. Specific comments about each proposed change are made below.

Proposed amendment #1: Adding the option of composite samples for small seed lots of capsicum, eggplant, tomato and corn

8. HortNZ acknowledges that seeds containing high-value genetic material are likely to arrive in New Zealand in smaller lots than seeds for commercial crops, and that requiring a standard number of 3000 seeds for testing per lot

means that a high proportion of seeds in a small lot are lost to testing (MPI 2022).

9. HortNZ understands that multiple small lots of seeds of the same species originating from a single site of production can be validly regarded as a single unit for testing purposes, provided the application of homogeneity for sampling and testing reflects the common risks (and/or risk mitigations) of the various seeds. We appreciate that the suggested measures are based on statistical calculations and using FAO-recognised methods (MPI 2022).
10. We also support the destruction or reshipping of all small lots that contributed to a composite sample that tests positive.
11. However, while recognising that these methods for testing composite samples are already in place for *Cucumis* and *Cucurbitaceae* in this Import Health Standard (IHS), HortNZ has some reservations about the practicalities of accurately implementing the proportionate sampling regimen either as a pre-export test or upon arrival. We are concerned that the complexities of applying this sampling protocol could lead to increased levels of human error than would be seen for a simpler regimen.
12. HortNZ can also see some challenges to auditing the composite sampling process, particularly when it is used during pre-export testing conducted off-shore. HortNZ request that MPI conducts audits to check that lots declared to be small lots do meet the definition and to check that composite samples meet the requirements.
13. HortNZ also notes that the option of composite testing for small lots is being proposed. What would be the course of action if an importer opted not to test small lots as a composite sample, but there were less than 3,000 seeds in the lot? How will statistically valid sampling be undertaken?
14. HortNZ notes that, for composite samples, “lots should have ‘homogeneity in factors such as: - origin - grower - packing facility - species, variety, or degree of maturity - exporter - area of production - regulated pests and their characteristics - treatment at origin – type of processing (FAO, 2017)’. If the lots have some of these factors in common, they are similar enough to combine in one sample.” (section (22) b) I in MPI 2022). HortNZ argues that, at a minimum, seed lots should have the following factors in common for seed to be considered part of a composite sample: origin, grower, species, area of production, regulated pests and their characteristics, treatment at origin and type of processing.
15. It is imperative that those undertaking the sampling are able to ascertain the validity of composite sample as a single unit for testing (both in terms of the production site and all other relevant homogeneity factors).

16. HortNZ believes that requiring importers to provide a declaration confirming the place of production of the small lots in their consignment is a critical aspect of this proposal. If the small lots do not come from the same place of production and production site, then using a composite sampling approach could increase the risk of infected or contaminated seeds entering New Zealand undetected.
17. HortNZ notes that a test sensitivity of 99% has been assumed for all sample size calculations (MPI 2022). This is very high and not all tests will perform at that level. Have sensitivity calculations been performed to see whether the number of samples required markedly increases if the test used has a lower sensitivity? Alternatively, MPI should consider including a requirement that tests have to be 99% sensitive in order to be used to test composite samples from small seed lots.
18. As a discussion about changing the Acceptable Level of Risk (ALOP) has not been had, HortNZ expects that any sampling changes that are made for capsicum, eggplant, tomato and corn manage risk at least to the same extent as it is managed now.

Adding a phytosanitary certificate as a requirement for *Raphanus sativus* (radish) seeds for sowing

19. HortNZ supports the proposal to add the requirement for phytosanitary certification of imported radish seeds.
20. HortNZ also notes with concern the fungal contamination of 29% of radish seed consignments in 2021 (MPI 2022). As this contamination rate appears to be based on visual inspections, the actual contamination rate could be even higher.
21. HortNZ urges MPI to consider introducing a requirement for fungicide treatment of radish seeds as well as monitoring ongoing levels of contamination.

Adding the option for *Phaseolus* (bean) and *Pisum* (pea) seeds be tested for the presence of quarantine pests offshore prior to export

22. HortNZ has serious reservations about the biosecurity implications of this proposal. There are high risk organisms included on the list of diseases that could enter New Zealand with seeds of these two species. Allowing seeds to be imported from places where these organisms may be prevalent based on the results of tests that have not been validated for use with seeds does not provide the required confidence that the seed is clean. This is especially

concerning when MPI's laboratory is unable to provide confirmatory testing as it is in the process of validating tests itself.

23. HortNZ strongly urges MPI to consider offering the option of testing mother plants using tests that have been validated for those sample types, rather than relying on unvalidated tests of the seeds themselves.
24. There would be substantial costs involved in responding to these diseases should they enter New Zealand and under GIA industry has to share these costs with the Crown. The negative impacts that a major response to one of these diseases would have on horticultural communities should not be underestimated. There is also the strong possibility that after the disruptions of a response eradication may not be actually be possible. Therefore, it is important to ensure that internationally recognised, validated tests are used in exporting countries.

Adding *Matthiola incana* and *Cyperus papyrus* to the list of species approved for import as pelleted seed

25. HortNZ notes that MPI is not proposing to add any specific measures for these two species to be imported as pelleted seed, which means there will be no requirement for phytosanitary certification, treatment etc.
26. HortNZ urges MPI to consider auditing this pathway during at least one full year of operation to check that it is a low-risk pathway.

Removing measures for some fungal pests

***Rhizopus maydis* and *Phaeocystroma ambiguum* on *Zea* (corn) seed**

27. HortNZ recognises the difficulties of knowing what species are and are not here in the absence of information from a freedom surveillance programme. However, HortNZ does not consider that a couple of notes in databases is strong enough evidence that a fungus is here. Regardless, HortNZ notes that the requirement for fungicide treatment of *Zea* seeds for other fungal pathogens should manage the risks of unwanted fungi arriving on this pathway.

***Peronosclerospora sorghi* and *Sclerospora graminicola* on *Panicum* (panicum) seed**

28. HortNZ is concerned that a lack of direct scientific experimental evidence is being interpreted as "no risk", when in fact it remains a lack of evidence either way. In countries where these pathogens are prevalent, whether the fungus can spread via seeds may not be important enough to warrant studies as there may be other more common routes of transmission. However, in a

country that is free of these fungi a less common transmission pathway can still present a risk of introduction.

Concluding Summary

29. In summary, HortNZ believes that managing the risk of pathogens on the seed pathway is vitally important for New Zealand. Access to small seed lots and high-value seed is critical for the future success of the sector, but biosecurity requirements for all imported seed should be adequate to manage the risk. We appreciate that this is a delicate balance, but one we consider can be achieved.

References

MPI (2022) Risk Management Proposal: Amendments to the Import Health Standard Seeds for Sowing 155.02.05.