National Seed Health System
TITLE: Phytosanitary Seed Sampling Inspection Procedures
VERSION: 1.2 DATE: 8/2026

Phytosanitary Seed Sampling Inspection Procedures

REVISION HISTORY: Version 1.1 (4/2025): Added sanitation program and sample marking requirements. Version 1.2 (8/2026): Requirements moved from Reference Manual A to Reference Manual B. Updated XPM references to current document version.

Reference Manual B – Section 3.

3. Criteria for the Evaluation of Sampling Procedures

3.1 Phytosanitary Seed Sampling Inspection Procedures

Samples for phytosanitary certification must be collected by an authorized certification official (ACO) (County, State or Federal) or by an individual with National Seed Health System (NSHS) accreditation, which is available to qualified public and private organizations.

3.2 Criteria for the Evaluation of Sampling Procedures

The NSHS requires all Accredited Entities (AE) to utilize either the AASCO Handbook on Seed Sampling or the ISTA method (Handbook on Seed Sampling and Chapter 2: Sampling) as listed in the reference. AASCO or ISTA seed sampling methods must be applied by the AE along with the following requirements:

3.2.1 A documented sanitation program must be in place for all seed sampling equipment. The AE's sanitation program shall address any relevant bacterial, viral and fungal pests and other contaminants that may cross contaminate seed lots or samples. Evidence (such as disinfectant label or results of in-house or published studies) on the efficacy of the selected sanitation program must be present in the entity's QMS documents.

3.2.2 Any officially drawn sample must identify the AE, sampler, and sampling date. This must be on the sample collection container (e.g., envelope) when the AE is sampling on behalf of a customer or externally distributing the sample.

3.2.3 Documentation must record each official sampling event. Documentation shall follow AASCO or ISTA requirements for lot identification, sampling method, and sampler identification. Documentation must include lot number or identifying information, total weight and disposition of the lot (number and type of containers storing seed), number of primary samples taken, and final weight of the composite sample. It should also indicate the name of the sampler, the date and any other relevant information. If automatic sampling was used, additional information relevant to the sampling event

should be documented such as total lot size, primary sample size, and primary sample timing as it relates to the total processing time.

Adherence to this program and to the sampling protocols for the utilized sampling methods will be evaluated for acceptance by NSHS at the time of application and during accreditation audits.

3.3 References

Association of American Seed Control Officials (AASCO). Handbook on Seed Sampling. 2016. https://www.seedcontrol.org/seed_sampling_handbook.html

International Seed Testing Association (ISTA). ISTA Rules 2025 Chapter 2: Sampling. January 2025. https://www.seedtest.org/en/publications/international-rules-seed-testing.html

International Seed Testing Association (ISTA). Handbook on Seed Sampling. 3rd edition, 2022. Handbook on Seed Sampling, 3rd Edition, 2022 - Handbooks - International Seed Testing Association

NSHS Reference Manual B: https://seedhealth.org/policy-documents/

NSHS Reference Manual A: https://seedhealth.org/policy-documents/

USDA APHIS Export Program Manual. 2026. https://www.aphis.usda.gov/import_export/plants/manuals/domestic/downloads/xpm.pdf

USDA APHIS Export Program Manual – Seed Sampling and Inspection. 4.3.2026. Located in PCIT or on the NSHS website at https://seedhealth.org/files/inline-files/Export_Program_Manual_Seed_Sampling_and_Inspection.pdf