

CERTIFICATION OF SEED TREATMENT PLANTS IN GERMANY AND OTHER EU COUNTRIES

To further develop our certification services for agricultural products and to enable clients to cover the full supply chain, SGS's accreditation portfolio has been extended to cover seed treatment plants. SGS Germany GmbH is now certifying seed treatment plants against SeedGuard and ESTA.

CASE STUDY

CERTIFYING TREATED SEEDS, BUILDING UP A CERTIFICATION SYSTEM

During the sowing of maize in spring 2008, a high incidence of bee poisoning was discovered in the Upper Rhine Valley and in South Bavaria near Passau, Germany. More than 12,000 colonies were affected and two thirds of the bees were lost. The total loss for some 700 beekeepers was estimated to be approximately €17,000.

The cause of the poisoning was identified as abrasion of dust from maize seeds treated with an insecticide containing the active agent clothianidin. The dust, loaded with the abrasion, was blown into the environment by pneumatic sowing machines and contaminated pollen and nectar.

As a result of this accident, legislation was introduced to prohibit the use of several insecticides (e.g. Clothianidin and Imidacloprid) and restrict the use of others such as Methiocarb. Since 2010, EU legislation regulates use of these insecticides and technical "Best Practice" for a seed treatment plant.



PILOT PROJECT IN GERMANY

To safeguard the quality of treated seeds and demonstrate the implementation of best practice the German Plant Breeders' Association (BDP), initiated a pilot project on the inspection of seed treatment plants together with Germany's Julius Kühn-Institute (Federal Research Centre for Cultivated Plants).

SGS joined this project and developed, together with the industry and the institute, an audit and certification concept, addressing careful and responsible treatment of seeds. After the pilot phase, the stakeholder group founded SeedGuard and SGS was the first independent certification body to be approved.

In parallel, on a European level the European Seed Association (ESA) developed ESTA, the European Seed Treatment Assurance. SGS was involved to develop the system and the corresponding checklist. Our experts tested the draft checklist under practical conditions with seed treatment plants in Germany and France.

Feedback from audit experts and clients was collated to make the system fit to certify seed treatment plants and allow them to label their products with the ESTA logo.

SGS's main role was to contribute to the overall certification system design and enable weaknesses and critical process steps to be identified and targeted systematically.

Building up a certification scheme to be accepted by both industry and government institutions requires a high level of professionalism, with the aim of finding moderate solutions which support both safety and practicality.

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SeedGuard (Germany's national scheme) is a Quality Seal that demonstrates appropriate and environmentally friendly seed treatment. Certified companies are allowed to use the logo in the form of a protected trademark. This standard is applicable for rape seed, corn and sugar beets and it is planned to open it to other grains during 2013. ESTA is applicable within the EU and covers a wide range of treated seeds such as beet, corn, rape seed and others. Like SeedGuard, the ESTA trademark can be used following certification. Both schemes are presently undergoing benchmarking, as ESTA aims to accept SeedGuard certified companies, and allow them to use the ESTA logo.



SGS offers audits and certification, as well as information on the standard criteria. SGS was involved in pilot audits and discussions during the set up of SeedGuard and ESTA and can share this experience with clients to help them meet the standards' requirements and criteria. An international network of auditors is trained and accredited for audits.

Our global auditor network can perform combined audits together with other applicable certifications on request. This reduces duplication of effort, saving clients time and money.

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MONITORING OF SEED TREATMENT

