

3. Draft Seeds Bill 2025- Environment

Higher penalty, regulating quality for sale and import – What the new Seeds Bill proposes
To address the proliferation of spurious seeds and modernize the outdated 1966 framework, the government has introduced the Draft Seeds Bill 2025, which mandates the registration of all seed varieties and introduces stricter penalties for quality violations while preserving farmers' traditional rights.

Context and Rationale

The Union Agriculture Ministry has released the Draft Seeds Bill 2025 and is currently soliciting public feedback.

Primary Objective- The Bill aims to overhaul the seed regulatory framework to improve seed quality, strictly regulate sales, and impose severe penalties for violations.

Need for New Legislation

Outdated Laws- The existing Seeds Act (1966) and Seeds (Control) Order (1983) are considered obsolete and fail to cover all seed varieties (currently only regulating "notified" varieties).

Regulatory Gaps- Critical categories like green manure seeds, commercial crops, and plantation crops currently fall outside regulatory ambit.

Voluntary Registration- Under current laws, registration is not mandatory, allowing poor-quality seeds to circulate freely.

Weak Penalties- Existing deterrents are ineffective, with minor fines (₹1,000) or short imprisonment (6 months) for selling bad seeds.

Current Challenges- The Quality Crisis

Prevalence of Substandard Seeds- There is a high volume of spurious (fake) and non-standard seeds in the market causing financial losses to farmers. Statistics (2022–2025)– Out of roughly 5.97 lakh samples tested, 43,001 were found to be non-standard.

Regional Disparity- The issue is acute in states like West Bengal, which accounted for 62% of the substandard seeds found.

Ineffective Enforcement- Despite government warnings, stop-sale orders, and legal cases, the flow of bad seeds persists due to weak legal frameworks.

Comparison- Old Act vs. New Bill

Feature	Seeds Act, 1966 (Existing)	Draft Seeds Bill, 2025 (Proposed)
Registration Scope	Voluntary; limited to "notified" varieties approved for public cultivation.	Mandatory for <i>all</i> varieties (except farmer-saved or export-only seeds).
Excluded Crops	Green manure, commercial, and plantation crops often excluded.	Comprehensive coverage of seed varieties.
Penalties	Low- Maximum fine of ₹1,000 and up to 6 months jail.	High- Fine up to ₹30 Lakh and up to 3 years jail for serious offenses.
Decriminalization	Minor and major offenses both treated as criminal.	Minor violations are decriminalized; only serious violations (fake seeds) attract criminal charges.

Key Provisions of Draft Seeds Bill 2025

Mandatory Registration- Every seed variety sold commercially must be registered.

Transition- Varieties already notified under the old Act will automatically be deemed registered.

Exemptions- Seeds produced by farmers for their own use or seeds intended solely for export are exempt.

Stricter Penalties- To deter the sale of fake/spurious seeds, the Bill proposes fines up to ₹30 Lakh and imprisonment up to 3 years.

Regulation of Imports- Strict guidelines will be imposed on seed imports to ensure only high-quality foreign seeds enter the Indian market.

Private Sector Role- The Bill encourages private sector participation to drive innovation and introduce better varieties. However, private sales will be strictly regulated to prevent quality compromise.

Farmers' Protection & Rights

Seed Freedom- Farmers retain the right to grow, save, use, and exchange seeds.

Restriction- Farmers are restricted only from selling seeds commercially under a brand name without registration.

Goal- The primary aim is to ensure farmers get quality seeds at reasonable prices and are protected from crop failure due to bad seeds.

Institutional Framework

Central Committee- Responsible for recommending standards (germination rates, genetic purity, seed health).

State Committees- Responsible for registering seed producers, dealers, and processing units.

National Register for Seed Varieties- A central database will be created to track all registered varieties, ensuring transparency and preventing fraud.

Mandatory Registration of Facilities- All Seed Processing Units must register with state governments to ensure processing meets quality norms.

Enforcement & Testing

Laboratories- Establishment of Central and State seed testing labs to verify quality.

Inspectors- Empowered to conduct inspections, search premises, and seize substandard seeds.

India's Seed Market Landscape

Market Size- Valued at approximately ₹40,000 Crore (\$5 Billion).

Supply vs. Demand (2024-25)-

Requirement- 48.20 Lakh tonnes.

Capacity- 53.15 Lakh tonnes (indicating a surplus capacity).

Sector Composition- Public Sector- Dominates variety release, accounting for 85% of varieties. Private Sector- Accounts for 15% of varieties released.

Concerns and Criticism

Farmer Groups (e.g., All India Kisan Sabha, Samyukt Kisan Morcha)-

Cost of Cultivation- Fear that corporate dominance will lead to predatory pricing, making seeds expensive for small farmers.

Corporatization- Concerns that the regulatory framework favors large corporations over small/traditional farmers.

Seed Sovereignty- Fear that MNCs may gain excessive control over India's agricultural resources, threatening national seed sovereignty.

Legal Conflict- Arguments that the Bill might undermine biodiversity protections and conflict with the *Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Act*.

Industry View (Federation of Seed Industry of India)- Welcomes the Bill as a "timely and necessary step" to modernize regulations and improve the business environment.

Way Forward

Current Status- The Bill is in the public consultation phase.

Legislative Path- Post-feedback, it will move to the Union Cabinet for approval. Scheduled for introduction in Parliament during the Budget Session (Early 2025).

Conclusion- The Bill represents a balancing act between modernizing the seed industry/encouraging private innovation and protecting the interests/sovereignty of small-scale farmers.

Source- <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/higher-penalty-regulating-quality-for-sale-and-import-what-the-new-seeds-bill-proposes-10393339/>