

6. Seed Act 2026- Environment

'Historic reforms for farmers'- Union Agriculture Minister Shri Shivraj Singh Chouhan shares details of new Seed Act The proposed Seed Act 2026 aims to replace the outdated 1966 legislation by introducing mandatory digital traceability (QR codes), compulsory registration for dealers, and heavy penalties for fake seeds, while explicitly protecting farmers' traditional rights to save and exchange seeds.

1. Context

Recent Development- The Union Minister for Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare (MoA&FW) provided a detailed briefing on the upcoming Seed Act 2026.

Legislative Timeline- The Act is expected to be introduced in the upcoming Budget Session of Parliament.

Primary Objective- To overhaul the outdated seed regulatory framework and directly address the challenges faced by farmers regarding seed quality and accountability.

2. Key Reasons for Bringing New Seed Act (Seed Act 2026)

Addressing Outdated Legislation (Seed Act, 1966)

Public vs. Private Shift- The 1966 Act was created when the seed market was public-sector driven. Today, the sector is vast, technologically advanced, and dominated by private players.

Technological Gaps- The old law lacks provisions for digital monitoring, traceability, and modern certification standards needed for hybrid and genetically improved varieties.

Lack of Seed Traceability

Current Issue- Farmers often lack information on the producer or certification status of seeds.

Consequence- When crops fail, identifying responsibility is impossible, making grievance redressal extremely difficult.

Combating Fake and Substandard Seeds

Rising Menace- Farmers frequently suffer losses from spurious seeds, false labeling, and poor germination.

Weak Deterrence- Under the old Act, penalties were minimal, and prosecution was slow and ineffective.

Growth of Private Seed Market

Uneven Quality- Rapid expansion of private companies has led to uneven quality control.

Regulatory Gap- The old law does not sufficiently regulate the registration and accountability of private seed dealers, leaving small farmers exposed to aggressive marketing.

Ensuring Food Security and Productivity

Direct Impact- Low-quality seeds directly compromise national crop output and price stability.

Climate Resilience- With climate change increasing agricultural risks, ensuring high-quality, resilient seeds is critical for food security.

Regulation of Imported Seeds

Risk- Weak regulation of imports can introduce unsuitable or low-quality varieties.

Goal- To prevent ecological and agronomic risks associated with unverified foreign seeds.

Protection of Farmers' Rights

Balancing Act- While regulating commercial sales, the Act aims to protect farmers' traditional rights to save, use, exchange, and share seeds, ensuring they are not criminalized for age-old practices.

3. Key Features of the Seed Act 2026

Nationwide Seed Traceability (QR Code System)

1. Mechanism- Every commercial seed packet will carry a QR code.
2. Function- Scanning the code reveals the producer, source, and dealer details.
3. Objective- To eliminate anonymous sales, detect fakes quickly, and enable faster remedies for aggrieved farmers.

Mandatory Registration

1. Scope- Compulsory registration for all commercial seed producers, traders, and dealers.
2. Restriction- Unregistered vendors will be strictly prohibited from selling seeds.

3. Goal- To ensure only authorized and accountable players operate in the market.

Stringent Penalties

1. Fines- Proposals include fines up to ₹30 lakh.
2. Imprisonment- Provisions for jail terms for deliberate violations.
3. Purpose- To create a strong deterrent against the sale of substandard or fake seeds.

Protection of Traditional Practices

1. Exemption- Explicit assurance that traditional practices (saving, exchanging seeds within communities) will not be restricted.
2. Focus- The regulation targets commercial seed quality, not non-branded traditional systems.

Scientific Evaluation of Imports

Rigorous Assessment- Imported seeds must undergo scientific testing for ecological and agronomic suitability before entering the Indian market.

Protection- Prevents the dumping of inferior foreign seeds unsuited to Indian conditions.

Institutional Mechanisms & Federal Cooperation

Oversight Committees- Creation of committees at both Central and State levels for better coordination.

State Role- Since Agriculture is a State Subject (Schedule VII), states will play a pivotal role in implementation, testing, and enforcement.

4. Expected Impact on Farmers

Impact Area	Benefit to Farmers
Productivity	High-quality certified seeds improve germination and yields. Reduces the risk of crop failure due to poor inputs.
Market Discipline	Mandatory traceability and penalties will significantly reduce fake/adulterated seeds. Critical protection for vulnerable smallholder farmers.
Transparency	Empowered decision-making through digital records. Ability to seek redressal if seeds fail to perform.
Innovation	Strengthens domestic research institutions (e.g., ICAR). Promotes development of locally adapted seeds, reducing reliance on imports.

5. Related Concerns & Challenges

Implementation Capacity

Infrastructure Gap- Effective enforcement requires modern seed testing labs and digital infrastructure, which may be lacking in smaller towns and rural areas.

State Disparities- varying institutional capacity across states could lead to uneven rollout.

Corporate Influence

Market Concentration- Stringent compliance norms might be easier for large corporations to meet, potentially pushing out small seed producers and concentrating market power.

Farmer Awareness

Digital Divide- The success of QR code traceability depends on farmers' ability to use smartphones and digital tools.

Education- Robust outreach programs are needed to educate farmers on how to verify seeds and file complaints.

Source- <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2215353®=6&lang=1>