



National Seed System for Released Varieties

Frequently Asked Questions



1. About

1.1. What is the National Seed System for Released Varieties?

The National Seed System for Released Varieties (NSSRV) is a government service developed to provide the farming families of Timor-Leste with secure access to good quality seed at planting time.

1.2. What are the benefits of National Seed System?

- Farming families will have enough quality seeds of proven food crop varieties to plant each year, regardless of when the good planting rains occur.
- The Timor-Leste Government can save money by not having to buy, store and distribute imported seed.
- Farming families can avoid using seed of varieties not suited to the local condition.

1.3. What does the National Seed System consist of?

The NSSRV consists of four components:

1. **Research & development** – The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAF) identifies, selects and develops the superior varieties for official release, and produces breeder and foundation seed under highly controlled conditions.
2. **Certified seed production** - Contract growers multiply foundation seed of released varieties under close MAF supervision to produce high-quality certified seed.
3. **Commercial seed production** - Registered seed producers multiply certified seed according to MAF's quality assurance guidelines to produce large quantities of branded and truthfully labelled commercial seed, which farmers and others can purchase with confidence.
4. **Community seed production** - Farmer groups use commercial seed to locally produce unlabelled community seed, which is properly stored and available for farming families to use next season for their food production.

1.4. How is seed quality guaranteed through the seed system?

Seed quality is assured through:

- clear systems and procedures that guide the government and farmers in producing good quality seed
- a quality assurance system built on capable staff and the properly equipped laboratories of the MAF Seed Department.

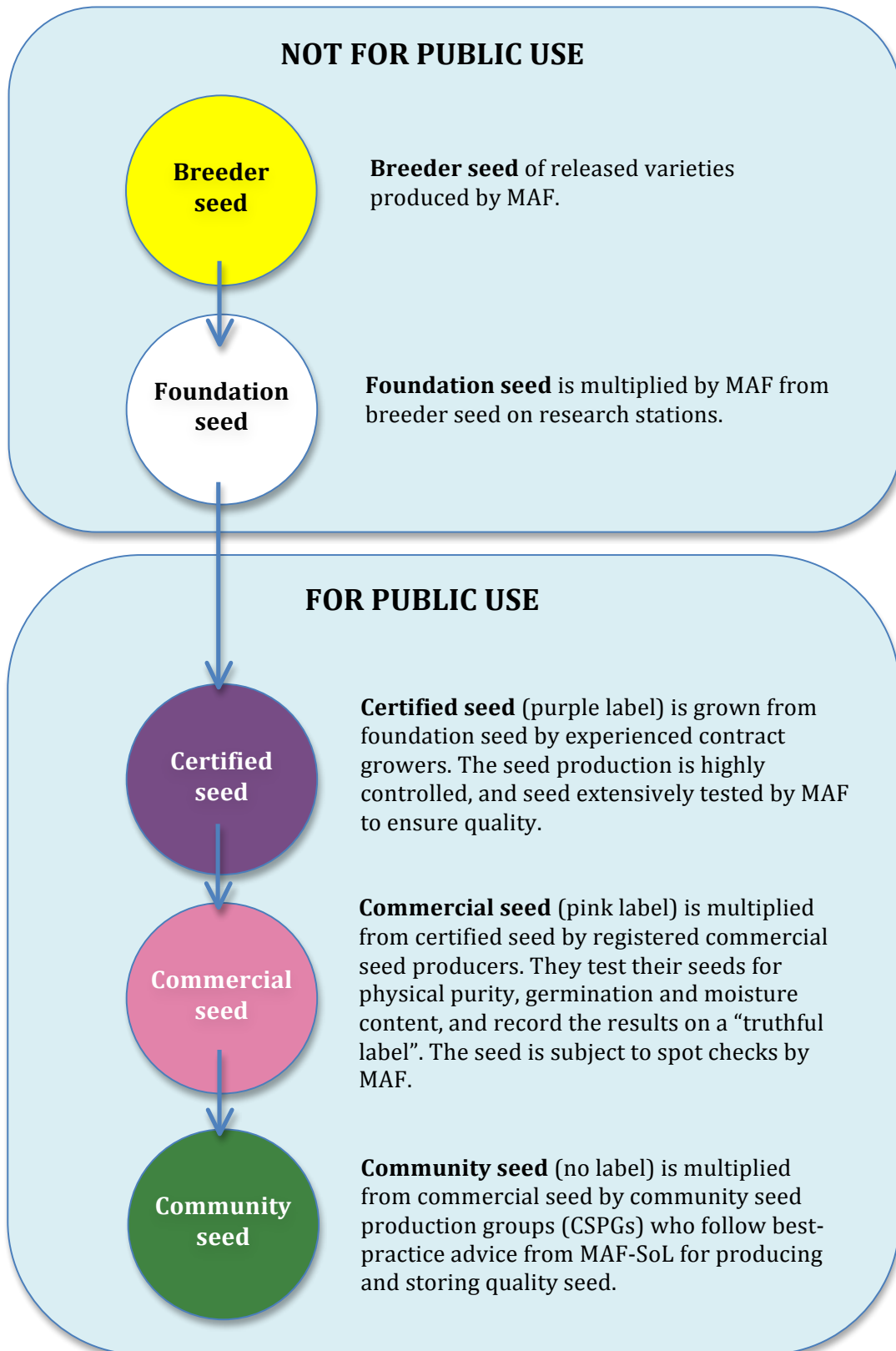
1.5. When was the National Seed System launched?

The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries launched the NSSRV in June 2013.

1.6. Who developed the National Seed System?

The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries and Seeds of Life developed the National Seed System in collaboration and consultation with farmers, MAF development partners and NGOs.

1.7. What seed is produced through the National Seed System?



1.8. Is the National Seed System sustainable?

Making the National Seed System for Released Varieties sustainable is a focus of the Seeds of Life Program.

2. Seed varieties

2.1. What seed varieties are currently included in the National Seed System?

The NSSRV currently includes the following improved varieties that have been released by MAF following extensive research and testing:

- Maize – Sele, Noi Mutin & Nai
- Peanut – Utamua
- Rice – Nakroma

2.2. How are the varieties chosen?

All officially released varieties have been assessed against a broad number of criteria, not only for superior yield and agronomic adaptability but also for their social, environment and gender impacts. Once deemed suitable, MAF's Variety Approval, Release and Registration Committee officially release them.

2.3. Do farmers test the varieties prior to release?

Yes. Before release, each variety must have been extensively location and farmer-tested on research stations and in many hundreds of on-farm demonstration trials (OFDTs) over numerous years (good and bad). Included in this research are many tens of farmer field days wherein farmers and their wives prepare, cook and taste-test the identified varieties to compare with known local varieties.

2.4. Will local varieties be included in the NSSRV?

As the NSSRV develops, it will be expanded to include new varieties such as favoured local varieties. As with all varieties, local varieties chosen for release must first be tested against a range of criteria and by farmers. The inclusion of local varieties will help maintain biodiversity in Timor-Leste and ensure farmers have secure access to a diverse range of quality seeds.

2.5. Are any of the released varieties “hybrid seed”?

Seeds of Life does not test and release hybrid varieties because farmers cannot easily produce hybrid seeds themselves.

2.6. Are any of the released varieties genetically modified seed?

No. All the released varieties have been obtained through traditional plant breeding and none have been genetically modified.

2.7. Who owns the intellectual property of the released varieties?

All the released varieties are public domain varieties. Farmers can keep the varieties and grow their seeds without paying any royalty.

2.8. Why aren't sweet potato and cassava included in the seed system?

While MAF has released improved varieties of sweet potato (Hohrae 1, 2 & 3) and cassava (Ai Luka 2 & 4), these are not included in the seed system as they are vegetatively propagated from cuttings. It is likely they will be included in the NSSRV in the future.

2.9. I've heard the terms "formal" and "informal" seed. What are they?

Formal and informal seed were the terms used at the start of the Seeds of Life program, but are no longer in use. Formal seed referred to breeder, foundation and certified seed. Informal seed referred to community seed.

3. For farmers

3.1. I want seed for food production only. What seed should I use?

Where possible, MAF-SoL suggests that you buy branded and truthfully labelled commercial seeds available in the market. Check with your MAF district office to find out which registered commercial seed producers are in your district.

As a second option, community seed can be used for food production. This is available in your suco and can be obtained from your local community seed producer group (CSPG).

3.2. My group wants to produce community seed. What seed should we use?

Commercial seed or certified seed. You can:

- buy commercial seed from the registered commercial seed producers in your district OR
- request certified seed from the Community Seed Producer Coordinator in your group's MAF district office.

3.3. I don't know which community seed producer groups or commercial seed producers are working in my district. How do I contact them?

You can contact your MAF Suco Extension Officer to find out.

3.4. Does the seed system replace traditional methods of obtaining seeds?

No. Farmers can use their current methods of obtaining seeds. In addition, the NSSRV gives farmers the option to:

- share and barter to obtain community seed from CSPGs in their district.
- buy seeds of superior variety from CSPGs or commercial seed producers

3.5. What is the importance of the labels?

The colour-coded labels allow people to easily identify the different seed types. By buying labelled seed, farmers, groups and others can be assured of its quality.

3.6. My community seed production group needs advice on producing and storing seed. Can the local Suco Extension Officer help?

Yes, your local SEO can provide training in the best ways to produce and store community seed. They can also provide information on other improved varieties of food crops that can be grown in your suco.

3.7. How often does my community seed production group need to use new certified or commercial seed?

For maize, it should be replaced with fresh, new commercial seeds every three years. For rice and peanut, it should be replaced every five years. New seeds should be sourced from your Suco Extension Officer or MAF district community seed coordinators.

4. For commercial seed producers

4.1. Who can become a commercial seed producer?

Individual farmers, private companies and farmers' associations involved in seed production can become commercial seed producers if they meet the registration criteria.

4.2. I'm interested in growing and selling commercial seed. What must I do?

You should first contact your Suco Extension Officer or MAF district seed officers to find out more information. They can then advise on the process to:

1. Register with MAF as a commercial seed producer (valid for five years)
2. Obtain an annual Commercial Seed Production Permit (must apply every year).

4.3. What are the criteria for registering as a commercial seed producer?

To apply for registration, seed producers must first meet the following criteria:

1. Possess a farmers association or company statute
2. Have had sufficient training on seed production and quality control
3. Be committed to following standard seed production, labelling and marketing procedures
4. Have at least one year's experience in growing quality seed
5. Possess basic seed processing equipment (tarpaulin and screen) and seed storage facilities (airtight steel drums or silos stored under cover).

4.4. Once a seed producer meets all the criteria, what's the next step?

The process to register is as follows:

1. Interested seed producers who meet the criteria obtain a registration form from their Suco Extension Officer or MAF district seed officers, who can also help with completing the form.
2. The District Seed Officer reviews the form and forwards it to the MAF Seed Department.
3. The MAF Seed Department authorises the District Seed Officer to conduct a visit to the producer's field to confirm that all criteria are met.
4. Following this, the MAF Seed Department reviews the field visit report and if successful, issues a Commercial Seed Producer Certificate (valid for five years).

4.5. Does the registration process cost anything?

No. Both registering as a commercial seed producer and for the annual Commercial Seed Production Permit is free.

4.6. What's the purpose of the annual Commercial Seed Production Permit card?

The CSP Permit allows a commercial seed producer to produce a specific variety of seed in an agreed location and area for a particular crop season.

5. For NGOs

5.1. My NGO is involved with farmer groups. How will the National Seed System for Released Varieties affect our work?

The seed system will benefit your NGO's farmer groups through improved access to quality seeds. If your NGO's farmer groups are currently involved in producing and marketing any of the NSSRV seed varieties, they will have to register as a commercial seed producer and obtain an annual Commercial Seed Production Permit. For farmer groups only involved in food production, they are not required to take any action.

5.2. My NGO works with farmers producing both seed and food. What seed should be used?

MAF-SoL recommends the following seed be used:

- **Certified seed** – for commercial seed production
- **Commercial seed** – for giving to farmer groups for food production, or for community seed producer groups to produce community seed
- **Community seed** - for food production.

5.3. Where can my NGO buy this seed?

- **Certified seed** – MAF-SoL suggest that you assist your registered commercial seed producers to obtain certified seeds from the MAF Seed Department.
- **Commercial seed** – this is purchased at the district level from registered commercial seed producers.
- **Community seed** – this can be obtained from community seed production groups in limited quantity for distribution within that community. Community seed is not commercial seed and cannot be sold in an open market.