

100 YEARS OF UTAH CERTIFIED SEED 1926 – 2026



Utah Agricultural Experiment Station
UtahStateUniversity

In 2026, Utah marks a significant milestone: 100 years since seed certification activities began in the state. This reflects a full century of work supporting genetic identity, seed quality, and agricultural reliability for producers, land managers, and restoration professionals throughout Utah and the Intermountain West.

What Certified Seed Is and Why It Matters to Farmers

Certified seed is produced through a rigorous, science-based quality assurance system that protects **varietal identity, genetic purity, and seed quality** that farmers rely on. Every certified seed lot is documented and inspected through multiple generations—beginning with breeder and foundation seed—to ensure that the variety maintains its expected traits, including yield potential, disease resistance, maturity, and stress tolerance.

The **Utah Crop Improvement Association** ensures the genetic purity of Utah's agricultural foundation by certifying essential traditional crops, including wheat, barley, grasses, and alfalfa. Through rigorous field inspections, isolation standards, and laboratory testing, the UCIA eliminates the uncertainties of varietal contamination and weed seeds while ensuring high germination rates. For farmers, this 'Blue Tag' certification provides a dependable, transparent input that optimizes field performance and secures access to premium markets requiring documented seed origin and identity.

What Happened in 1926?

1926

Seed certification in Utah formally began when the state became a member of the **International Crop Improvement Association**—the organization now known as the **Association of Official Seed Certifying Agencies (AOSCA)**. Membership placed Utah within the early national effort to improve seed quality and varietal integrity across U.S. agriculture.

1926-1937

Certification activities were administered directly by the **Utah State Department of Agriculture and Food (UDAF)** under the authority of the Federal Seed Act. These early years established the foundation of Utah's seed quality system, including field inspections, isolation requirements, and documentation practices.

1937

The **Utah Crop Improvement Association (UCIA)** was formed as a nonprofit corporation of seed growers and conditioners and designated as Utah's official seed certifying agency.

1947

Oversight was transferred from UDAF to the **Utah Agricultural Experiment Station (UAES)** at what was then the Utah State Agricultural College, strengthening the program's scientific foundation and ensuring close alignment with plant breeding and research efforts. Through a memorandum of understanding, the UAES Seed Certification Specialist continues to serve as UCIA's Secretary Manager today.

Program Growth and Innovation (1999–2025)

Over the last quarter century, UCIA has expanded significantly beyond traditional agricultural seed certification to respond to emerging ecological, restoration, and industry needs. Several key program additions have shaped the modern UCIA:

Wildland Collected Seed Program (est. ~1999)

Around 1999, UCIA established the **Wildland Collected Seed Program**, a major innovation that positioned Utah as a leader in provenance-based seed sourcing. The program provides a certification pathway for seed collected directly from native rangelands, ensuring:

 **Accurate documentation of collection origin**

 **Genetic integrity within wild populations**

 **Maintenance of ecotypic identity**

 **Suitability for landscape scale restoration projects**

This program is especially critical for agencies such as the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, Bureau of Land Management, and land trusts that require verified, source-identified native seed for post fire recovery and habitat restoration. It also laid the foundation for Utah's strong involvement in AOSCA's **Pre Variety Germplasm (PVG)** standards.

Cool Season Sod Certification Program (est. 2012)

The UCIA expanded into turfgrass quality assurance with the launch of the **Cool Season Sod Program**. Developed in partnership with growers and research specialists, this program provides certification for sod producers. It ensures varietal purity, field cleanliness, and traceability for commercial sod producers and end users such as sports facilities, landscapers, and municipal buyers.

Warm Season Sod Certification Program (est. 2025)

Most recently, UCIA introduced the **Warm Season Sod Certification Program** to meet growing demand driven by drought conditions and water conservation priorities. Certification now supports warm season species such as Hybrid Bermudagrass and other emerging drought tolerant turf species

This addition modernizes Utah's sod certification portfolio and aligns it with regional water management trends.

Together, these expansions broaden UCIA's services and reinforce its role as a statewide partner for agricultural crops and for ecological restoration and sustainable landscape management.



Why It Matters Today

Certified seed remains central to Utah's agricultural and ecological systems. For crop producers, seed certification ensures:

-  **Varietal identity and genetic purity**
-  **Transparent documentation**
-  **Market access**
-  **Quality assurance consistent with AOSCA and Federal Seed Act standards**

For rangeland and restoration partners, programs such as the **Wildland Collected Seed Program** and AOSCA's **PVG standards** help preserve ecotype identity and provenance—essential to successful habitat restoration in Utah's diverse landscapes.



Looking Forward

As we recognize **100 years of seed certification in Utah**, UCIA remains committed to strengthening inspection protocols, improving data systems, supporting new staff, and expanding national leadership through AOSCA. These efforts will ensure that both the certification program and the organization remain strong and relevant as we approach the **UCIA's organizational centennial in 2037**.

We extend our appreciation to the growers, conditioners, inspectors, researchers, and agency partners whose work built this legacy, and look forward to continuing this work in the next century.

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