

## **N.D. State Seed Department Offices Closed to the Public Due to COVID-19**

Effective March 18, the North Dakota State Seed Department offices in Fargo and Grafton are closed to the public.

“We are taking this action to help prevent the spread of coronavirus to our employees so that operations can continue uninterrupted,” says Steve Sebesta, N.D. State Seed Department deputy commissioner.

“While most of our samples arrive by mail, some customers prefer to deliver samples to the department in person rather than sending them in the mail,” Sebesta continues. “The rear entry is still open for sample drop-off for the convenience of those customers.”

The State Seed Department is the largest seed certification agency in the U.S. in terms of seed production acres. As a result, the department’s labs perform an estimated 20,000 tests each year on nearly 90 different crop kinds to support the seed industry in North Dakota.

The department operates two labs at its offices on the North Dakota State University campus. Among other specialized tests, the seed lab analyzes samples for purity and germination, factors required for certification and labeling according to state and federal seed laws.

The diagnostic lab performs tests to determine the presence of seed-borne diseases as well as genetic tests to verify the identity of the varieties offered for sale as certified seed.

The department also houses a greenhouse in which potato mini-tubers are produced for the state’s seed potato growers. The tissue culture lab produces genetically pure potato clones as a source of seedstock for that greenhouse.

Operations to maintain these critical functions continue.

“March and April are typically the busiest months for seed testing as seed producers, retailers and farmers rush to complete certification of their products or determine the quality of seed they may have retained for planting,” says Sebesta. “On average, the labs perform more than 6,300 different tests in March and April, almost a third of the annual total.”

Sebesta continues, “The Seed Department is committed to providing the services the state’s agriculture industry needs to continue to function successfully this year. We are taking this action to protect our staff that is dedicated to completing their duties to support the seed producers, retailers and farmers of the region.”

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