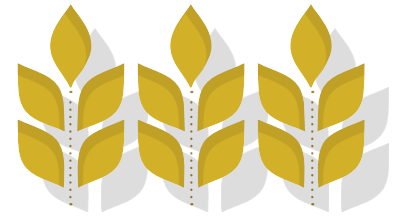


# Changing the Pest Act is Crucial to Fusarium Management Now and Into the Future

Prepared by the Industry Ad-Hoc Fusarium Working Group December 2017



Currently *Fusarium graminearum* is listed as a Pest in the Alberta Agricultural Pest Act, Sect. 22.c states “No person shall... (c) for propagation purposes acquire, sell, distribute or use any seed, root, tuber or other vegetable material containing a pest.” This means that no person/company can sell/plant infected seed. With the spread of *Fusarium* throughout the province the access to disease-free seed is close to impossible in many crop types such as, durum wheat and corn.

Removing a serious pest from the Pest Act may seem counter-intuitive when the overarching goal is to mitigate the effects of the disease. However, the current zero-tolerance policy was implemented when *Fusarium* was not present in Alberta. With its spread, the zero-tolerance approach no longer reflects reality. Additionally, the zero-tolerance regulation curtails advancements in disease management and mitigation in several facets:

- New crop varieties that may have better tolerance to the pathogen have issues being imported into Alberta since much of the seed may contain low levels of the pathogen.
- The practise of heat-treating breeder seed to destroy the pathogen on new seed varieties is costly, time consuming and possibly linked to negative effects on seed quality.
- Alberta-based in-field research of control systems is essentially non-existent because the pest is regulated.
- Focus on seed infection levels distracts from the suite of best management practises that should be utilized by every Alberta farmer.

➤ Current regulation curtails advancements in disease management and mitigation of *Fusarium*

## The Path Forward

Removing *Fusarium* from the Pest Act will allow the industry to elevate management systems with enhanced transparency. Once a pathogen, spread predominately by air-borne spores, is resident in an area it is critical to utilize a **total management system**, and not a single defense mechanism, such as disease-free seed.

Removing the pathogen from the Pest Act will allow farmers to focus on management measures appropriate for their area.

Examples of progress to accommodate regional differences in pest control measures include:

- Alberta Wheat Commission launched the *Fusarium* Risk tool that helps producers assess whether environmental conditions favor disease development.
- Alberta Seed Processors launched its “SEED SMART” program which promotes the use of seed testing as a plant health and disease surveillance measure.
- Ad Hoc group members have shown industry leadership in hosting producer information sessions on *fusarium* management.
- There are tools and technologies (e.g. seed treatments) available as part of a suite of Best Management Practices to help effectively manage and mitigate the threat of this pest.

The members of this working group are committed to an extensive communication and education process that will assist farmers with effectively managing this disease. Being proactive, rather than reactive is key. This value chain group is keen to collaborate with government to ensure ongoing public and private surveillance and research with the goal of building a proactive *Fusarium* Management Plan to give farmers the tools required to mitigate this disease.

➤ A zero tolerance policy is no longer relevant, as the air-borne disease is here to stay.

## Key Points

- Now that *Fusarium* is established in all parts of the province, the current regulation is obsolete because the disease is predominately spread by air-borne spores once established.
- A status quo regulatory environment is not a science-based approach to addressing the issue.
- Since regional infection levels vary, adaptive regional management programs make sense.
- Industry supports education and communication along with surveillance, best management practices and research as the most effective approach.

➤ Industry is committed to a proactive total management approach.

