

Q&A - European Seed Treatment Assurance – ESTA

What is ESTA?

The European Seed Treatment Assurance Scheme is an assurance scheme developed to cover the process of applying seed treatment products. The ESTA scheme has been developed jointly by the European Seed Association (ESA) with the major seed treatment product manufacturers.

Why is it being introduced?

In 2010, the EU introduced a new Directive (2010/21), which requires seed treatment product manufacturers to ensure certain insecticide seed treatment applications (specifically those containing clothianidin, thiamethoxam, fipronil and imadacloprid) are 'only to be performed in professional seed treatment facilities'.

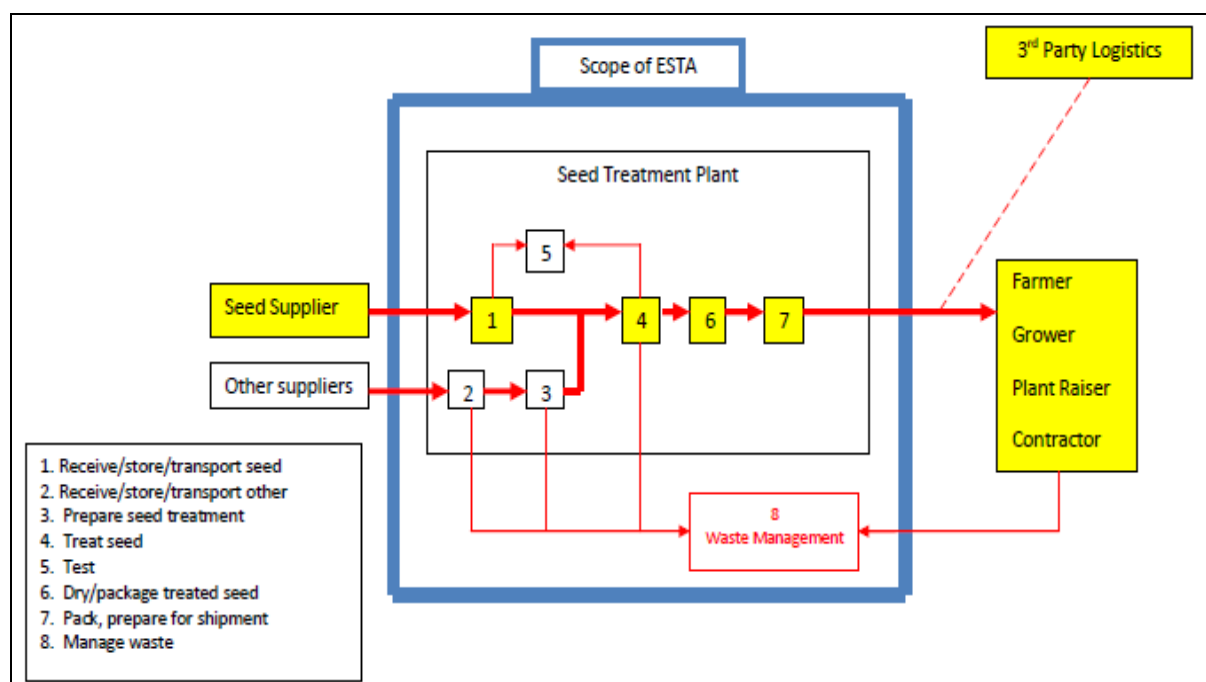
The legislation was, in part, a reaction to concerns over the impact of neonicotinoid seed treatments on bee health following incidences of bee deaths being linked to the poor preparation of seed and poor application of treatment products on maize seed in mainland Europe.

Why is it needed?

The EU Directive mentioned above sets out specific stewardship requirements to be met by seed treatment product manufacturers. Included in this is the reference to 'only to be performed in professional seed treatment facilities'. A failure to meet the necessary stewardship requirements could result in a removal of registration for the products concerned and therefore their loss to the industry.

What does it cover?

The scope of ESTA begins with the transport and receipt of seed at the treatment process. It follows the application of seed treatment, sampling of seed to determine loading and dust levels immediately post treatment, the subsequent storage and despatch of seed and the handling of waste containing or treated with the seed treatment. It also covers the advice on safe handling of treated seed which is given to growers.



Does it conflict with, or duplicate, seed certification

Those developing ESTA have been very clear to emphasise that ESTA should not be seen as duplication for seed certification. The certification process remains wholly unaltered by ESTA. Certification may however play a role in delivering some of the ESTA requirements in which case the ESTA audit would simply confirm the standard was met in that way. The two processes are therefore complimentary and will not result in duplicate auditing or verification.

Who will be covered by this?

For autumn 2012 the expectation is that companies using neonicotinoid seed treatments on oilseed rape, sugar beet and field vegetable crops will be audited and become ESTA accredited. Companies processing cereals may join ESTA in 2012 but the target is for them to join the scheme from autumn 2013.

The ESTA standard covers the use of seed treatment products, whether certified, standard or farm saved seed. NAAC is in the process of incorporating the ESTA standard into their own Verified scheme and both UK versions will be formally signed off by ESA prior to use.

How is it audited?

Meeting the requirements of ESTA will be achieved through companies being audited against the standard by PAI, the company responsible for existing TASCSC audits. Companies who are existing TASCSC members would simply extend their scope to cover this additional module. Adding ESTA to the existing TASCSC audit is the most cost effective means of delivering the scheme in the UK. Current TASCSC participants should therefore contact PAI to arrange this extension of TASCSC.

For companies currently outside TASCSC there will be a registration fee and a requirement to make contact with PAI to arrange an audit

What will the audit costs be?

The audit costs are not yet finalised but individual company costs could vary, particularly for existing TASCSC participants. Fees will consist of two main elements, the AIC registration fee and PAI audit fee. ESTA audits are expected to be completed for most participants within a half day audit – for some companies it may be possible for the combined TASCSC and ESTA audit to be completed in that time period – therefore incurring no extra audit fee. Companies wanting to establish the cost level should contact PAI.

Who do I need to contact for further information?

Management of the ESTA standard is through Garry Rudd at AIC. Lorraine Chambers at PAI is responsible for the scheme audit. Contact details for both are below:

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