AFRICAN BIOLOGICALS ALLIANCE

For Africa. By Africa.

REGISTRATION · SOUTH AFRICA · FERTILIZERS

Group 3 fertilizers

Biofertilizers, biostimulants, humic and fulvic acids, seaweed and water absorbent products: products that help plants grow, rather than protect them from pests.

3 trials at least to claim a whole crop group	**6 weeks** for a growth trial
1/2, 1x, 2x the rates for phytotoxicity	**R9,207** to register a Group 3 fertilizer

WHICH GROUP

Fertilizers, by what they contain

100 g/kg

Group 1
100 g/kg or more of N, P or K

Group 2
under 100 g/kg, or other recognised nutrients

Group 3
natural or synthetic substances or organisms that improve growth, yield or the soil:
seaweed, organic acids, biofertilizers, plant growth promoting bacteria, coatings, moisture absorbers

> Group 3 is for products that enhance growth. A product that protects plants against pests and disease is an agricultural remedy instead. A claim of induced resistance to disease makes a biological product a remedy, not a biofertilizer.

FIND YOUR PRODUCT

What each kind needs

Every application needs the Registrar's form, a laboratory analysis, a certificate for potentially harmful elements, a safety data sheet, and proof that the product works and does no harm.

Product	Certificate of analysis	Harmful elements (Table 12)	Efficacy trials	Phytotoxicity trials	Also
Biofertilizer or biostimulant	●	●	●	●	identity, permits, counts, purity
Humic, fulvic or amino acid	●	●	not needed	●	origin, solubility, pH, carbon, ash, moisture
Seaweed, animal or plant origin	●	●	●	●	scientific name, country, processing
Water absorbent	●	●	●	●	water retention and release

Fulvic, humic and amino acid products need no efficacy trial, but then carry no claims. A proven claim may be made.

TRIALS

Prove it works, and prove it does no harm

How the trial is set up

6 wk At least six weeks, measuring biomass or yield
For a growth claim, on at least one representative crop.

x3 Half, normal and double rates
To test phytotoxicity. One trial can show both.

x3 Repeat if the gain is not significant
At least twice, to show a trend.

95 Results to 95% confidence

Who does it

1 A SACNASP-registered investigator
At an organisation able to run it.

2 Laboratory, glasshouse or field
With controls and replicates for statistics.

3 International data supports local data
It does not replace it.

Test one, claim the group

at least three trials in total to show a trend

Row crops: grain maize, sweetcorn, sorghum, millet	**Row crops: small grain** wheat, barley, oat, rye	**Legumes** beans, soybean, lentils, lupins, clover, alfalfa, peanut
Pome fruit apple, pear, peach	**Stone fruit** apricot, nectarine, peach, plum	**Citrus** orange, lemon, mandarin
Nuts macadamia, pecan, hazelnut	**Grape vine** table grape, wine grape	**Bulb vegetables** onion, leek, garlic
Root and stem vegetables carrot, radish	**Leafy vegetables** cabbage, lettuce, broccoli, spinach	**Cucurbits** butternut, cucumber, squash
Potato any cultivar	**Solanaceous fruits** tomato, peppers, chilli	

LIVING PRODUCTS

Biofertilizers: checks on the culture

01
Identify
By accepted sequencing procedures.

02
Assess risk
A literature study approved by Plant Health, for microbes not yet released here.

03
Deposit
In the ARC or a reputable culture collection, with passport data.

04
Permits
Import, mass release, bioprospecting, and notice of the production facility.

05
Count
Viable CFU for each microbe, and spore counts.

Purity limits the OECD tier screening

Aerobic plate count	under 100,000 cfu/g or ml
Anaerobic spore-formers	under 100,000 cfu/g or ml
Yeast and mould	under 1,000 cfu/g or ml
E. coli	absent in 1 g or ml (or thermotolerant coliforms under 10 cfu)
Staphylococcus aureus	absent in 1 g or ml

Tier 1
Microbial activity, and E. coli or thermotolerant coliforms. A positive result triggers Tier 2.

Tier 2
The full set of indicator organisms.

Shelf life
At least six months. The CFU on the label is the count at the end of the study.

Trial design
A control without the microbe, non-sterile soil, and normal and double rates.

> A traditional, well-known biofertilizer, or a blend with known organic acids, may be accepted as low risk without toxicity or residue data, if no pesticide claims are made.

THE LABEL

What it must carry

Every Group 3 label

1. The concentration
   In g/kg or mg/kg.
2. The name of the main ingredient
3. Substantiated claims
4. Instructions for use
5. It must also meet the fertilizer regulations and SANS 1268

If it holds living microbes

1. Viable units per organism
   CFU, spores, cells or mycelia.
2. Genus and species of each organism
3. Liquid: g/ml and cfu/ml. Solid: g/kg
4. Shelf life and manufacture date
   Matching the certificate of analysis.

WHERE IT IS UNCLEAR

Ask before you rely on it

This 2019 guideline says	But
Written under the old department name, with fertilizer regulations of 2017	Whether it is current is not confirmed
Fertilizer or remedy depends on the claims	An induced resistance claim makes it a remedy: see the biological remedies data guide
Applications may be faxed copies	Ask the registrar's office how to submit
Fees from 1 April 2026	Check the current tariff

Information, not legal advice. Facts as of 26 October 2026, from the Registrar's Guidelines for registration of Group 3 fertilizers (June 2019) and Government Gazette 54123 (13 February 2026). Later changes are not reflected. Guidelines page: https://www.nda.gov.za/index.php/publication/581-guidelines

Sources

Prepared by the African Biologicals Alliance from these documents. They belong to the department and remain subject to its own terms.

- Guidelines for registration of Group 3 fertilizers. Issued by the Registrar of Act 36 of 1947, June 2019. https://www.nda.gov.za/index.php/publication/581-guidelines
- Regulations relating to tariffs. Government Gazette 54123, 13 February 2026.

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