



## SEED CERTIFICATION AND THE O.E.C.D.

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### Introduction:

In December, 1964, New Zealand made formal application to join the O.E.C.D. (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) Scheme for the Varietal Certification of Herbage Seed Moving in International Trade. This application followed nearly a year of preliminary study by the Farm Advisory Division of the Department of Agriculture and the Grasslands Division of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research.

A scheme for the varietal certification of herbage seed moving in international trade was instituted by the decision of the Council of the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (O.E.E.C.) in 1958.

With the change of the O.E.E.C. into the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (O.E.C.D.) the decision of the Council of the O.E.E.C. was repealed and replaced by the decision of the Council of the O.E.C.D. which adapted the scheme to the legal situation after the coming into force of the O.E.C.D. Convention. Following the agreement concluded between the O.E.C.D. and the Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations (F.A.O.), the possibility of admission to the scheme was extended to those non-member countries of the O.E.C.D. which are members of F.A.O.

Countries now participating in the O.E.C.D. scheme are Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Federal Republic of Germany, Finland, France, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom and United States of America.

### New Zealand's Position:

New Zealand has applied to join the O.E.C.D. scheme for the simple

reason that failure to do so could ultimately result in some sort of an embargo being placed on our herbage seeds by member countries of O.E.C.D. This information was contained in a statement by a high official of O.E.C.D. who warned that E.E.C. countries were drawing up regulations which would prevent the entry into those countries of any herbage seed not certified under O.E.C.D. rules. Should the United Kingdom, which imports the largest quantity of our herbage seeds, join the E.E.C., the situation could be critical. Further, Australia which is the second largest importer of our herbage seeds is contemplating joining O.E.C.D. and the same position could apply there. Thus, whereas in the early stages of the formation of O.E.C.D., New Zealand was asked to participate, now she is begging for admittance. Coming in at this late stage and having no voice in O.E.C.D. policy, we have been presented with a fait-accompli in as far as the O.E.C.D. rules are concerned. Member countries on the Secretariat have formulated rules which are foreign to us and which we have to accept to participate. The rule on isolation, for instance, will cause a certain amount of hardship in some cases. This rule requires varieties capable of cross-fertilisation to be isolated by 100 yards, a situation which could cause problems for neighbours. Since this country in the past has ignored isolation as a factor in certification, it has been decided to maintain this position for its own certified seed but to apply the isolation factor as a criterion for qualification for O.E.C.D. labels. There will thus be for a time at least certified seed produced in New Zealand which qualifies for the O.E.C.D. label and some of which does not. This will probably result in a price differential for certified seed which qualifies for the

O.E.C.D. label as against that which does not. Merchants will naturally prefer to purchase seed for which they can obtain O.E.C.D. labels and will be prepared to pay accordingly. Because of administrative difficulties, it is not proposed to maintain the two parallel schemes indefinitely so that farmers will ultimately be forced to consider isolation as part and parcel of the certification scheme.

A further difficulty arising from the application of the O.E.C.D. rules is that due to the large quantities of suckling clover normally present in white clover crops in this country, no New Zealand certified white clover seed will be eligible for the O.E.C.D. label. The O.E.C.D. rules allow not more than one plant of suckling clover in twelve square yards of white clover. Similar standards apply to ryegrass in cocksfoot and red clover in lucerne. This is unfortunate as certified white clover seed forms a large proportion of our overseas sales of herbage seed. Until we become members of O.E.C.D. we cannot contest this rule and so we are faced with the situation of attempting to control suckling in white clover crops or forgoing participation in the O.E.C.D. scheme for this species.

### **Specialised Seed Production:**

At the moment there is little or no specialised production of herbage seed in this country. In Great Britain and Europe this is the rule rather than the exception. The feeding of livestock is secondary to the production of high yields of clean seed. Grasses are normally sown pure, nitrogen being supplied in the form of artificials, the use of which is normally subsidised by the Government. In this country, seed production is normally a by-product of pasture management, the production of meat and wool being the primary consideration. Nitrogen is supplied by the use of clovers which complicate management for seed production in the case of grasses. Conversely, the production of clover seeds is complicated by the presence of grasses. With meat and wool fetching the prices they do, it is unlikely that specialised seed production could compete. Prices obtained for herbage seeds are variable and

depend on those obtained on the overseas market. Further, since the war, the demand for our herbage seeds has been fairly static and we are meeting competition from producing countries which did not worry us at all before. Until the end of the war, our certified herbage seeds were considered to be very suitable for use in most European countries. This is still the case, but an intensive breeding programme overseas has resulted in the production of varieties more suitable in the countries of their origin. It must be realised that New Zealand varieties were bred and selected for New Zealand conditions and now European countries are finding that their locally bred varieties can be more satisfactory for them.

A possible future may lie in the multiplication of overseas varieties for the ultimate return of the produce to the country of origin. Parts of New Zealand are provided with soil and climate which make seed multiplication relatively safe and productive. Artificial drying, a must in Europe, is not normally necessary and high quality seed can be produced. Harvesting conditions in Europe are not ideal and seed production is often a hazardous business. The Department of Agriculture recently opened the door to this kind of venture and O.E.C.D. makes it a practicable proposition. Under the O.E.C.D. rules, a breeder in one country may permit Basic seed of his varieties to be multiplied and certified in another. Such seed would come under the control of the Designated Authority in the country to which it was exported and the resultant seed would be eligible for certification under the O.E.C.D. rules.

Whether or not this would be attractive to New Zealand growers it is difficult to say as it must be borne in mind that such seed would have to be produced under contract at a price previously determined by the merchant in the country of origin. Such a price would be based on that ruling in the originating country, taking into consideration freight costs both ways together with merchants' charges. The New Zealand grower would thus receive less than his counterpart overseas for the same product. The only way this deficiency could be overcome would

be to obtain maximum yields which in turn would call for specialised seed production. While European growers find seed growing under contract to merchants perfectly normal, the same situation does not apply in this country where seed to sell provides the farmer with one of his few remaining outlets for bargaining. However, if our small-seed trade is to survive, the production of overseas varieties may well be necessary. It is a matter worthy of careful consideration.

### **O.E.C.D.:**

In the introduction to its rules O.E.C.D. states that, "The objective of the O.E.C.D. Herbage Seed Scheme is to encourage the use of seed of consistently high quality for the improvement of fodder production in participating countries." This it is attempting to do by laying down uniform rules for seed certification procedures in member countries. The rules are reasonable in operation and provided they are strictly observed in member countries should lead to an improvement in the varietal purity of herbage seeds generally.

When New Zealand was first considering applying to join the scheme, it was felt that here was an "open sesame" to the entry of our seeds into member countries. It was felt that the O.E.C.D. label would be recognised as the identification of quality material. However, it was soon learned that this ideal was not to be achieved so easily. Since applying for membership, we find that both Belgium and France, member countries of O.E.C.D., require extensive tests in their own countries to ascertain whether or not our seeds are suitable for their use, whether certified under the O.E.C.D. scheme or not. This was rather a blow and it is to be hoped that our varieties are suitable. We know for instance that 'Grasslands Manawa' (short rotation) ryegrass is acceptable to France as considerable quantities have been shipped there as a result of an earlier favourable test. If our other varieties are acceptable, one may rest assured that France will insist that they are certified under the O.E.C.D. scheme.

Is the scheme worth the trouble and expense? I think it is. One

may look on it as an insurance policy. Our sales of small seeds annually bring in at least £1,250,000 in overseas exchange and even if this amount is small in relation to that obtained from the sale of meat, wool and dairy products, it is an item worth preserving.

### **How O.E.C.D. Affects the New Zealand Grower:**

In expectations of being accepted by O.E.C.D., the Department of Agriculture has introduced certain changes to its own scheme in order to be in a position to supply O.E.C.D. certified seed at the earliest possible moment.

As from 1 January, 1967, the O.E.C.D. system of nomenclature will be applied to all New Zealand certified seeds with the exception of certified Permanent Pasture perennial ryegrass, cocksfoot and white clover, certified browntop, certified subterranean clover, certified Phalaris tuberosa and Government Approved turnip and swede seeds. Under this system, certified Government Stock seed will be known as Breeders seed, certified Pedigree seed as Basic seed, certified Mother seed as Certified seed, 1st generation and certified Standard seed as Certified seed, 2nd generation. This terminology will apply to all seeds except those listed above, whether or not they qualify for an O.E.C.D. label.

In order to qualify for O.E.C.D. certification, growers are now obliged to supply the previous cropping history of the areas they wish to enter for certification. This is because O.E.C.D. requires a minimum of two years between the harvesting of one species or variety of grass and the harvesting of another crop of a species or variety with which it is liable to be cross-fertile. For clover, the time interval is three years.

Areas eligible to produce certified Basic (Pedigree) seed must, in addition to the time interval requirement, meet the isolation requirements laid down, that is 100 yards between such areas and any species or variety likely to cause contamination by cross-fertilisation. In the case of one ryegrass variety, this would mean 100 yards from **any** other ryegrass variety being saved for seed. In the

case of areas eligible to produce Certified seed, 1st generation (Mother) and Certified seed, 2nd generation (Standard), in order to comply with O.E.C.D. requirements, there is an isolation requirement of 100 yards between seed crops of 'Grasslands Ruanui' perennial ryegrass and 'Grasslands Ariki' perennial ryegrass and between seed crops of 'Grasslands Manawa' ryegrass and 'Grasslands Paroa' Italian ryegrass, but not between say, 'Grasslands Ariki' and 'Grasslands Paroa'. This 100 yard gap automatically applies to the two red clover varieties and to any other varieties likely to cross-pollinate.

It is this 100-yard gap which will cause the greatest problem in seed producing areas, particularly where boundary fences come into the picture. The Department has made provision for an artificial isolating strip to be provided by a grower who is prepared to cut out 100 yards of his crop prior to flowering. In a small paddock, the economics of this would be doubtful but it may be worth while if a grower wishes to have his crop passed as Basic seed. At all times, the Department has endeavoured to meet the requirements of the O.E.C.D. scheme with the minimum of hardship to growers. It is realised that there may be hardships but these are unavoidable.

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