

Forage Queen

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WHAT ARE YOU PLANTING?

Today's high prices for alfalfa hay, accompanied by high production costs, place a premium on a grower's judgment in selecting his planting seed. This is why an alfalfa grower must know what he is planting.

Alfalfa, being a perennial, is usually harvested for three years before being rotated to another crop. Thus, alfalfa seed that is infested with weed seeds or inferior in any other way may cause problems for a much longer period of time than with an annual crop such as barley or oats.

Alfalfa seed grown under the regulations of the California Crop Improvement Association must meet rigid standards or it will fail to be certified. It must have at least 85 percent germination and contain less than 0.2 percent weed seeds. It cannot contain any noxious weeds and no more than 0.1 percent other crop seeds.

Added Efforts

In order to meet such high standards, the seed association has a complete record from the time it leaves the plant breeder until it is completely certified and delivered to the seed dealer.

As it was growing in the field it was carefully inspected for weeds, off types, and volunteer plants. Before it was

harvested, the harvester and the truck were carefully inspected to make sure that they did not carry any contaminants. At the cleaning plant, it was further watched to see that it did not get mixed with other varieties.

Production of certified alfalfa seed does not just happen, but involves years of experience by growers, processors, harvest men, and plant breeders working together to make the best possible seed available to hay growers.

Fresno County in 1969 has grown about 36,000 acres of alfalfa for certified seed production. Field inspections were carried out by the Crop Improvement Association assisted by the Agricultural Commissioners' Office, the Farm and Home Advisors Office, and the State Department of Agriculture. The total acreage of alfalfa seed (certified and non-certified) grown in Fresno County in 1969 was about 54,000 acres, valued at approximately \$12 million.

Insurance Bargain

Hay growers sometimes complain about the additional cost of certified alfalfa seed. It should be remembered that the extra care, time, and labor that the growers and processors put into the seed to insure its purity, must be compensated. The only way to meet these extra costs is through the price of seed.

1720 S. Maple Street, Fresno, California 93702

Telephone 233-2284

In 1968 Fresno County alfalfa seed growers averaged receiving about 3½¢ more for a pound of certified seed than the uncertified seed of public varieties.

Protection against having noxious weed seeds, such as dodder, in the planting seed is reason enough in Fresno County for growers to plant certified alfalfa planting seed.

The guarantee of genetic purity of certified variety seed is important and enables a grower to predict the growth characteristics and disease and insect tolerance of his future crop. The performance of certified varieties is known from extensive performance tests.

Since the genetic make-up of certified seed from a variety does not change basically, the variety's performance can be predicted with accuracy under different management and environmental conditions. The extra few cents per pound paid for certified seed is very cheap insurance considering the risks assumed otherwise by the grower.

Alfalfa Blends

An alfalfa blend is a mechanical mixture of seeds composed of two or more varieties or brands of alfalfa seed. The components of a blend may or may not be certified seed.

To predict the performance of a blend before actually planting and raising hay from the seed it would be very helpful for the grower to know exactly what varieties or brands of alfalfa are contained in the blend and in what proportions. This information is not usually found on the seed tag of blends being marketed in California.

Blends of alfalfa seed may be made with seed from certified varieties; however, a blend itself is not eligible for certification because it is a mechanical mixture of alfalfa seeds with different genetic composition. The composition of an alfalfa blend is subject to change at the discretion of the seed company who makes the blend.

Alfalfa Brands

Alfalfa brands are being marketed by several seed companies in California. Brands are similar to varieties in many respects, but are subject to genetic change from one year to the next. This allows a seed company to advertise a brand name and continue to improve the performance of the brand by a continuous selection program for desired growth characteristics or for improved disease and pest tolerance.

This continuous procedure of selection for improvement of a brand does not usually allow enough time to develop the necessary performance data to make certification practical for any one year's model of a brand.

If growers are planting uncertified alfalfa seed, it is advisable to first determine if any harmful weed seeds, such as dodder, are contained in the planting seed.

ALFALFA HAY PRODUCTION REPORT

The strong prices throughout the 1969 alfalfa production-year will undoubtedly cause increased plantings for 1970. In several producing areas in California, alfalfa has been one of the most profitable crops grown in 1969.

In the past years when this same price structure has been present, increased plantings of as little as 4% have resulted in a price depreciation the next year.

According to the California Crop Reporting Service, the 1969 alfalfa acreage of 1,129,000 acres is the lowest acreage in the State in the past 15 years. The following listed information was developed by the California Crop Reporting Service and the County Agricultural Commissioners.

15-YEAR ALFALFA SUMMARY

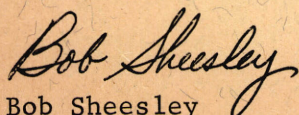
<u>Year</u>	<u>1,000 Acres</u>	<u>T/A</u>	<u>\$1,000,000</u>
1969	1,129	5.70	-
1968	1,152	5.60	168
1967	1,164	5.30	181
1966	1,141	5.60	180
1965	1,176	5.35	151
1964	1,203	5.3	160
1963	1,168	5.4	180
1962	1,156	5.2	141
1961	1,204	5.1	128
1960	1,192	5.0	146
1959	1,146	5.2	157
1958	1,135	4.8	131
1957	1,170	4.6	127
1956	1,206	4.5	128
1955	1,182	4.6	144

1967

COUNTIES WITH THE LARGEST ALFALFA ACREAGE

<u>County</u>	<u>Acreage</u>	<u>Average T/A</u>
Fresno	148,000	6.0
Imperial	135,000	6.1
Tulare	119,600	7.4
Kern	117,000	8.2
Merced	75,400	5.3
San Joaquin	67,600	6.6
Kings	63,800	6.0
Stanislaus	53,400	6.6
Yolo	52,000	5.88
Madera	48,000	5.9
Riverside	45,300	6.1
Siskiyou	43,000	3.0
Los Angeles	35,500	7.1
Modoc	27,300	2.9
Glenn	21,000	5.3

Sincerely,



Bob Sheesley
Farm Advisor