

Quality Crops Start With Quality Seed

As you do your fall planting this year, you'll probably be putting a higher quality of seed into the ground.

Seed technology is keeping pace with modern scientific advances. Variety purity has increased, weed seed content is lower, and actual seed quality has improved. Genetics research is intensified and new mechanical procedures make handling smoother and more efficient. To a large extent, seed production is a highly specialized industry.

But when you buy seed, it's still the same "you can't tell a book by its cover." No matter how intently you examine a handful of seed, you can't tell how many seeds will grow and how many will not.

Don't worry, though, because someone has done the job for you. Because of State seed laws and the Federal Seed Act, enforced by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and State Departments of Agriculture, each sack of seed must be labeled with descriptive quality information.

Reading the label correctly is up to you. It's possible to find low quality seed on the market, but you can protect yourself by checking the label.

Germination percentage is a label requirement on all farm seed. It's determined by growing seeds from each lot. Samples are placed in special growth chambers at private, commercial or State seed laboratories. The number of seeds that produce normal sprouts is used to determine the germination percentage assigned to that lot.

The germination test date also is required on seed labels. If the

test was made more than six months ago, the germination percentage may not be as high as the label shows.

No matter how good the germination percentage looks, check the label again. There's more to be found. The seed content of each sack of farm seed must be broken down by percentage to show the amount of pure seed, other crop seed, weed seed and inert matter, such as chaff. Generally, noxious-weed seeds must be listed by name and number per pound.

Even with 85-percent germination, a sack that contains only 50-percent pure seed isn't doing you much good. And, if the weed seed percentage is high, you're borrowing trouble.

Using the percent of pure seed and the germination percentage, you can figure how much you're paying for seed that is expected

to grow. Multiply the two percentages and divide the result into the price per pound. The answer is the amount you're paying per pound for pure germinating seed. It's an easy way to compare seed so you know you're getting your money's worth.

Another label requirement is the name and address of the seller or shipper. It tells you whom to contact if you question the quality or labeling of the seed.

You may find two other designations on the package, treated and certified.

If seed is treated with a pesticide, required treatment labeling is your ticket to caution. Keep the seed clearly labeled and out of reach of both children and animals. Don't handle the seed any more than necessary, and get rid of extra seed by burying it in

small amounts deep in the ground.

Certified seed must meet quality standards. The certification program is administered by the state agriculture department, agricultural college or grower's association, depending on the state. The growing crop must pass field inspection. Seed samples must be sent to the proper State agency for testing. Once certified, this seed may bring premium prices because of its genetic purity. Many states also have purity and germination standards for certified seed.

Enforcement of label

regulations is accomplished by state seed agencies. When seed is shipped across state lines, correct labeling is enforced by USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service in cooperation with state seed agencies. State inspectors make spot checks of seed from retail outlets. The samples they take are tested in the state seed labs to confirm proper labeling.

If a mislabeled product is found, the violator can be prosecuted. While it's impossible to test every seed lot, the threat of prosecution and the competition between seed companies gives you reasonable assurance that the seed you buy will not be mislabeled.

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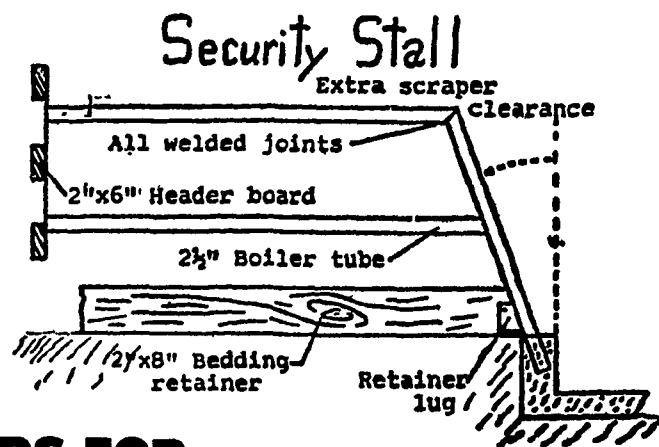
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