

# U.S. Seed Sales to France Zoomed in 1973-74 But Likely To Turn Down This Season

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**F**RENCH FARMERS greatly increased their plantings of U.S. seeds—mainly grasses and legumes—in 1973-74. Imports of U.S. seeds skyrocketed to \$4.2 million, compared with only \$1.7 million in 1972-73.

But the excellent year for U.S. seed sales to the French is not likely to be repeated. Seed supplies are adequate, not only in France but throughout the European Community.

Further, a new common catalog (approved variety list) of certified forage seed varieties has been developed by the Community. The new catalog—a compilation of all Member States' catalogs—came into effect on January 1, 1975, although the regulation has not yet been published.

This new catalog could dampen demand for U.S. certified seed, as well as for domestic-grown seed, by increasing the number of varieties available to French farmers. Since several U.S. varieties were already in some individual country catalogs, however, sales of these seeds may increase now that they can be sold in all EC countries.

France is an important agricultural producer, second only to the United States as an exporter of agricultural products, so that the U.S. seed industry is keeping close tabs on market

possibilities there. French farmers are especially interested in newly developed U.S. Durum varieties and in the relatively new pelleted sugarbeet seeds. The French market is also likely to continue strong this season for certain U.S. lawn grasses, such as bluegrass and red top.

France increased its production of almost all varieties of forage seeds in 1974-75. Quantities of certifiable alfalfa seed, for example, rose from 7,220 metric tons to 8,000. In contrast to the more adequate supplies, demand for seed in France is lagging. Very poor weather conditions last fall had a negative effect on forage seed sales. Also, some planned fall planting was not accomplished because of wet fields.

Sales of certified seeds by the French seed industry have increased sharply since 1970, when France made seed certification mandatory for most species, except vegetables and flowers. Traditional use of homegrown seeds has been practically eliminated, replaced by certified varieties. Breeders, growers, and traders, through an interprofessional organization (GNIS), have promoted seed usage and highly integrated the market in the areas of cereal and forage seeds.

Wholesale turnover in the French seed industry in 1973-74 rose to \$375

million from \$292 million in 1972-73 and \$229 million in 1971-72. Some of this expansion, however, has been from higher prices for seed of new varieties—such as the pelleted sugarbeet seeds (monogerm), which have greatly expanded their share of the market.

French exports of seeds and plants soared in 1973-74 to a value of \$57.3 million, versus only \$28.5 million the previous year. The more-than-50 percent increase was largely the result of an expanded volume of potato and corn seed exports, as well as rising legume seed prices. Seed imports during this period, however, surged to \$73 million from \$53.1 million—up 41 percent—so that in spite of the exceptional export showing, France is still a net importer of seeds.

**Cereal seeds.** Domestic marketings of certified cereal seeds, excluding corn and sorghum, edged up 6 percent in 1973-74 to reach 456,200 tons. More than ever, French farmers are interested in planting winter varieties, especially barley, where sales spurted ahead by 140 percent between 1970-71 and 1973-74, against a rise of only 23 percent for spring barley.

Two trends are emerging in French cereal seed marketings. The life span of a specific variety is notably shorter than 10 or 20 years ago; and the market is no longer dominated by one or two varieties, owing to the rise in the number of varieties available to farmers.

French farmers are showing particular interest in several new cereal varieties. For feed wheat, the British variety, Maris Huntsman, is gaining popularity. Bidi 17 is still the most-wanted Durum variety, but Durtal is increasing its share. Lakota and the recently introduced Wells variety—both from North Dakota State University—have proven

of interest to farmers.

Marketings of certified corn seed advanced by only 4 percent in 1973-74 from the previous year, when the increase was just 2 percent—reflecting stagnation of corn acreage in France. Bumper seed crops in 1973 of 125,000 tons boosted carryover stock of corn seed to a very high 42,600 tons.

French interest in growing corn for silage could sharpen in the next few years. Of varieties planted, single cross hybrids are in demand, owing to more uniformity plus high yields.

**Forage seeds.** A key factor in the development of the French seed industry has been the expanded market for forage seed. In 1972-73, forage seed sales swelled by about 30 percent. Although 1973-74 saw a slowdown to only 5 percent over 1972-73, prospects are good for continuing growth, especially for use on France's 5.7 million acres of temporary meadows.

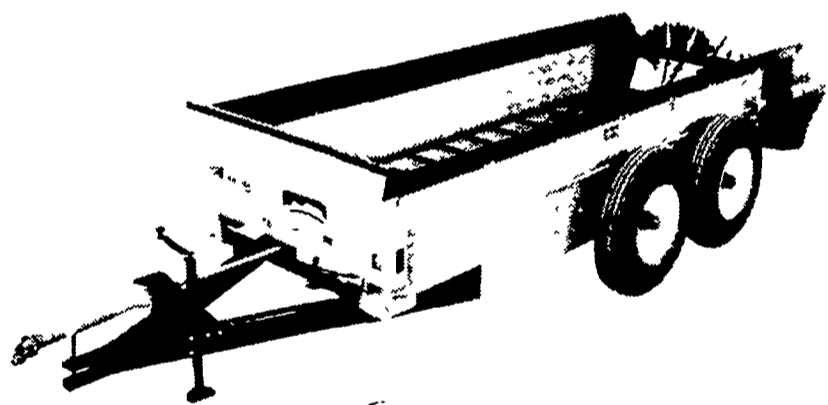
Responding to insufficient production and high prices, domestic sales of grass seeds dropped by roughly 11 percent in 1973-74, contrasting with the startling 45 percent gain in 1972-73 over the previous season. The sales slowdown affected mainly perennial ryegrass and meadow fescue. On the other hand, French farmers have shown a keen interest in tall fescue, and sales of alfalfa and red clover seeds have continued strong.

**Sugarbeet seeds.** The market for sugarbeet seed is very active in France. Some 1.3 million acres of sugarbeets were planted in 1974. Because of the sugar shortage, the EC Council is pressing for an even larger acreage this year.

More than half of French sugarbeet acreage last year was planted with genetic monogerm seed, which has increased in use impressively in recent years. Sales of pelleted seed rose 33 percent in 1974 over 1973, both exports and imports are growing—with imports up 20 percent in 1973-74.

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