

Farm Business News

Seed industry and government regulations

BY DON WERTMAN
Pa. Seedsmen's Assn.
This is the age of regulation. Although we know the situation has worsened during the last decade due to an increase in the number and scope of regulatory agencies, the seed industry has been under federal regulation since 1939. The Federal Seed Act of 1939 is a truth in labeling law which is managed by the Seed Division of the American Marketing Service, a branch of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The Act is concerned with

seed moving in inter-state commerce. The only way a violation is cited is when the individual state regulatory official submits a complaint to the Federal Agency. This procedure leaves the individual states with the authority to handle its own problems and when possible, work out solutions with neighboring states without federal intervention. If only this were the case with other federal agencies.

Many of the rules and definitions cited in the Federal Standards have

been adopted by the individual states, thereby creating uniformity among agencies. The Regulations are lengthy, technical, and rigid. We will highlight several which are of particular interest to producers of agronomic crops in Pennsylvania.

The current Seed Act in Pennsylvania dates back to 1965. Several of the key points are: the list of restricted or prohibited weed seeds, labeling requirements, certification requirements, and the prohibitions placed on the marketing of illegal seed.

Restricted or prohibited weeds are those which are determined to be highly destructive or difficult to control within this state by normal cultural practices.

In the case of restricted weeds only so many per pound are permissible in legal seed and when present must be listed on the label.

Examples are Buckhorn in red clover or Bedstraw in timothy. Prohibited weeds include species such as quackgrass or Canadian thistle. No seed can be sold which contains these weeds.

Each state has its own list of restricted or prohibited weeds. Differing climatic conditions or cultural practices determine whether a weed will cause a problem in that state.

It is in all cases the seedsmen's responsibility under the law.

Again, requirements vary by state but most agree that the following information be provided: A purity analysis which lists the pure seed content, weed seeds, other crop seeds and inert matter.

These are stated on the analysis tag by percentage of weight. For example, an analysis tag stating .05 percent weed seeds means that there is one half pound of weed seeds in 1000 lbs. of seed.

Or 0.45 per cent inert matter means there is 4.5 pounds of dirt or inert matter in 1000 pounds of seed.

Again, seed laws determine how much other material is permitted in a given lot of seed before it is no longer legal for sale. Stated another way, most

seed must have a minimum purity to be legal for sale. The minimums differ drastically for different seeds.

Certified seed grain must be 99 percent pure whereas grasses such as brome or bluegrass are perfectly acceptable with a purity of 85 percent.

Other required information on the label includes the accepted name of the seed, lot number, the state or country of origin, the net weight of the container, the treatment if any, and the germination.

The two most important items here are the treatment and germination. Some seed is treated while other isn't and the user should be aware of what the seed treatment is intended to protect.

In most cases, treatment performs two functions: it protects the seed while stored in the bag; and/or it protects the seed from deterioration when first planted. Both aspects are good but limited.

Growers should know if the treatment is an insecticide or fungicide, or perhaps only inoculation in the case of legumes. The label won't give all this information, but it will state the properly accepted name for the treatment and will be flagged by the accepted

terminology of "Warning" or "Caution" depending on the type of chemical.

In any case, treated seed must be handled with caution and protected from children and livestock.

Germination is another important item on the label. The law specifies how low the germination may be of certified seed, while in the case of non-certified it is required that the germination be stated along with the date of test. The consumer must then decide if the germination meets his criterion.

For most seeds the germination test date must be current within nine months, while five months is maximum for interstate shipments. Again seed variety determines minimum acceptable germination. Most seed grains should germinate 90 percent while varieties such as crownvetch are acceptable at germination levels such as 65 percent.

One confusing aspect of germination information has been the term "Hard Seed." Hard seed is part of the total germination for legumes. It is a desirable characteristic in most cases.

Hard seed is viable seed which needs more time to germinate than other viable seeds in the lot. The hard seed coat of legumes reduces the intake of water

necessary for germination. The aging process breaks down that coat as do environmental conditions such as freezing and thawing.

Generally speaking, the higher the hard seed count the newer the seed. Hard seed is desirable in that it is strong and healthy and will germinate when conditions are right.

Newly-harvested alfalfa will have a hard seed percentage as high as 30 percent. This is a good indication of a healthy seed lot. It's nature's way of holding back germination until another day when conditions are right.

It is, in fact, a built-in mechanism to insure preservation of the species. Many farmers look for low "hard seed" count. Don't be among them. Consider yourself lucky if hard seed count is high.

Although there is much more to be said about labeling, we will leave it to the seedsmen. It is well to know that there are guidelines, minimum requirements, and restrictions in the marketing of seed which are in force for the farmers' protection.

Take a look at the tags on your seed purchases this spring and know that much goes on behind the scenes in the preparation and use of that label.

Named to dealer's council

WASHINGTON BORO — H. Melvin Charles of Washington Boro recently was honored as one of ten men named to the National Dealers Advisory Council for Vigortone Products. The company has more than 6500

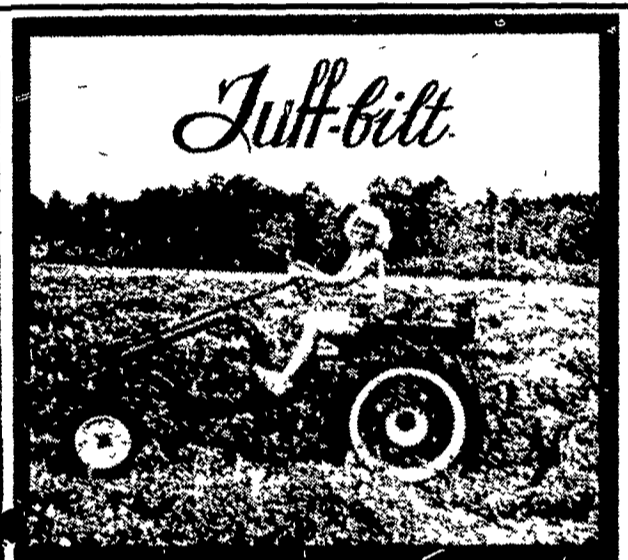
farmer-dealers throughout the 39 states in which they do business.

Vigortone - a company which manufactures livestock pre-mixes, named the men to the council as a grass-roots committee to offer suggestions regarding company policy relating to the business phase of the dealer's activity.

The council held its first meeting recently with company officials and executives at Cedar Rapids, Iowa--the company's national headquarters.



H. Melvin Charles



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