

Seed Certification Thirty Years Old

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The Arizona Crop Improvement Association was formed thirty years ago. It is appropriate on this anniversary to review the seed certification movement in the United States and in Arizona.

The Arizona Crop Improvement Association, like those in other states, is a non-profit organization of growers whose objective is to make available genetically uniform and high quality seed. In all states where this objective is achieved there is a close cooperative relationship with the Land-Grant College, the U. S. Department of Agriculture, private breeders, and commercial seed firms.

Seed Program 75 Years Old

Field crop varieties have been developed by agricultural experiment stations for about 75 years. The first varieties were made available to the public by giving seed to leading farmers. These farmers increased the seed and gave a portion of the increase to their neighbors.

Growers observed the performance of the new release and reported yields to the breeder. Results of these tests were used much the same as extension test demonstrations are used today. This method of increasing and introducing a new variety was satisfactory in some cases, but often it was not.

Contamination from foreign pollen sometimes was a problem. Often the new variety was renamed and sold by unscrupulous dealers. High germination and purity standards were difficult to maintain. The agricultural leaders of that time realized there was need for a better system for increase and release of new varieties.

Field Inspections Begin

The first efforts in the direction of seed certification were those by experiment station workers of the Land-Grant Colleges and Universities. Wisconsin initiated inspections of seed fields in 1913. A pure seed association was organized in Maricopa County, Arizona, in 1914, at the time of the introduction of Pima cotton. Montana established a seed inspection program in 1915. Other states followed quickly with similar programs. All but five of the states now have seed certifying agencies.



STATE FAIR exhibit of Arizona Crop Improvement Association. Note prominence given to certified seed tag, symbol of quality.

Arizona growers were among the first in the nation to recognize the importance of an organized cooperative effort to make quality seed available to all. Numerous groups were formed to facilitate the production and marketing of pure seed.

The Arizona Crop Improvement Association was formed June 2, 1933, in a meeting of the officers of the Chilean Alfalfa Seed Growers Association, the Maricopa County Farm Bureau Pure Seed Association, and the Yuma County Pure Seed Association, in the County Agent's office at Yuma.

An Historic Meeting

Present at this important conference were Sam Wallace, president of the State Farm Bureau; William Walton, president of the Buckeye Farm Bureau; Laurides Anderson, president, Chilean Alfalfa Seed Growers Association; Wayne Wright, president of Yuma County Pure Seed Association; A. D. Cox, manager of Yuma County Farm Bureau Marketing Association; G. E. Blackledge, Yuma County Agricultural Agent; and University of Arizona representatives H. N. Watenpaugh, Extension Agronomist, and Ian A. Briggs, Research Agronomist. The first officers elected were William Walton, Palo Verde, president; Wayne Wright, Roll, vice-president; and Mrs. Martha Boggs, Phoenix, treasurer.

The Arizona Crop Improvement Association, now officially recognized by state law as the state's official seed certification agency, has served growers of field crops in Arizona well. Through the years its representatives have authorized the use of the certified label on many varieties of seed. By 1960 some 180 Arizona grow-

ers were producing 27,500 acres of seed crops for certification. In 1962, alfalfa, barley, cotton, millet, oats, safflower, sorghum, wheat, and several specialty crops were certified.

Several states exceed Arizona in acres of seed inspected for certification. However, only a few states have a greater percentage of their total cropland used for the production of certified seed.

Has Full Time Secretary

Operation of the Crop Improvement Association in Arizona is supervised by directors elected by growers who produce seed in Cochise, Maricopa, Pima, Pinal and Yuma counties. Harold Jacka has served as secretary-treasurer of the Arizona association since January 1, 1947. He developed an official handbook, first published in 1949. Mr. Jacka works closely with Experiment Station and Extension Service workers, with growers, and with members of the seed trade.

Each year has brought new challenges and opportunities for seed certification agencies. In recent years many new varieties have been produced by commercial breeders. Arizona was one of the first states to extend certification to privately developed hybrids and varieties. About twice as many different hybrids and varieties were certified in 1960 as in 1950.

A current problem of all certification agencies is maintenance of rigid quality standards for seed, which generally is sold without the benefit of elaborate advertising programs. The need to use pure seed of the best adapted varieties is just as important in 1963 as in 1933, when agricultural leaders of the day first met in Yuma to form the Arizona Crop Improvement Association.