

Pasture seed: why quality matters

key messages

- High-quality pasture seed is the first step in ensuring your new pasture is off to the best start.
- Buying certified seed, or seed from a reputable quality assurance program, is the only way to ensure you get the variety you have paid for.
- Be careful to ensure your seed does not contain contaminants, such as weed seeds

Smart from the start: A new pasture will only be as good as the seed it was sown with. Make sure your pasture gets the best start with high-quality seed from a reputable seed supplier. (Photo: Catriona Nicholls)

New pastures are critical for increasing farm productivity. Not only can new ones support higher stocking rates (and kilograms of product per hectare), but they provide insurance when times get tough, through improved persistence and dry matter production compared with older pasture varieties.

However — to get the best from any new pastures, appropriate species and cultivar (variety) selection are critical. It is also important to ensure you get what you pay for in terms of variety and seed quality.

What makes good quality seed?

Varietal purity

After deciding what pasture species and variety you want to grow, you need to be certain the seed you buy is that variety. The only way to be absolutely sure the seed you buy is the variety you selected is to buy **Certified Seed**, or seed produced under a reputable quality assurance programme, to ensure varietal purity. Certification means you will buy seed that is as close as possible to the genetic make-up of the variety as selected by the breeder.

For more information about seed certification go to the [Australian Seeds Authority Ltd website](http://www.australianseedsauthority.com.au).

National code of practice

The *National Code of Practice for Labelling and Marketing of Seed for Sowing* aims to ensure you have consistent and accurate information to make informed decisions about the suitability of seed for sowing. This Code applies throughout Australia. The Code was developed by the seed industry and sets out the:

- information required on the label, and
- acceptable conduct for marketing and dealing with performance claims about a variety.

All members of the Australian Seed Federation (ASF) abide by the *Code of Practice*. At a minimum, this ensures the label contains essential information about the species, chemical/additive/biological treatments and the availability of statement of seed analysis. In addition the code sets out acceptable conduct for marketing and dealing with performance claims about a variety. A list of ASF members and a copy of the Code can be found on the [ASF website](http://www.asf.org.au).



Physical purity

It is important to ensure any seed you buy does not contain contaminants, such as undesirable weed seeds. Seed may have been produced in another district or State. It may also contain weeds not present on your farm. Weeds prohibited in one State may not be prohibited in another. Weed details are usually not displayed on the label, but weed seeds found in the sample are listed in the Statement of Seed Analysis — often referred to as a Purity and Germination or P and G statement.

Reputable seed suppliers will give you a copy of the Statement of Seed Analysis if you ask. But, seed analysis statements are only as reliable as the sample provided. Samples of certified seed, and seed from reputable quality assurance programmes, are representative of the seed lot on sale. Be certain the seed lot, or seed line number, quoted on the statement matches the one on the bag or label.

Germination percentage

A high germination percentage is critical in order to establish a healthy pasture. The germination percentage is the percentage of seeds that germinates to produce normal seedlings. Determining normal seedlings requires skill and a controlled environment. A laboratory test is essential. Depending upon the storage conditions, the germination test results should remain valid for up to 12 months from the date of testing.

Reputable testing laboratories that are members of the Australian Seed Federation (ASF) include;

- Agwest Plant Laboratories www.agric.wa.gov.au
- AsureQuality www.asurequality.com.au
- Seed Services Australia www.ruralsolutions.sa.gov.au/seeds

The Australian Seed Authority (ASA) has authorised these organisations to undertake seed certification activities in Australia. These organisations can certify seed under both the OECD Seed Schemes and the Australian Seed Certification Scheme.

This PII snapshot was developed in conjunction with the Australian Seed Federation (ASF).

FURTHER INFORMATION

More information about seed quality read the article *Seed Certification — Why you should buy only certified seed*, which can be found on the [Australian Seeds Authority Ltd website](http://www.australianseedsauthority.com.au)

More information about current pasture varieties and seed suppliers can be found on the ASF Seed Products Database on the [ASF website](http://www.asf.org.au).

