

Pasture seed is

Story by Julie McDonald



GROWERS Graham Stoney and Robert Friday (also chairman of the Mansfield Seed Pty. Ltd.) inspect the stubble on Graham's property.



TWO harvesters auger seed into a truck-mounted bulk bin and tractor-drawn bin. After departmental certification the seed is taken to the cleaning works.

There is a lot of truth in the old adage that "half the breeding goes down the throat." Seed grower Graham Stoney is quick to agree with this.

He feels that stock owners should concentrate as much on good feeding as they do on good breeding.

"If cattlemen and sheepmen concentrated more on improving their pastures, their stock would benefit immensely. They would fatten quicker and look so much better on this type of feed," he said.

According to Graham, the improvement of pasture grasses for livestock feeding has been neglected in Victoria.

Less than a quarter of Victoria's grazing land has been sown with pasture species, according to statistics.

Graham Stoney is one of 23 pasture seed growers in the Mansfield area.

Last year he grew 152 tonnes of ryegrass, 23 tonnes of fescue, and 5.5 tonnes of phalaris.

This year he is harvesting 340 hectares of the pasture seed.

In Victoria, there are three main seed producing areas — the Mansfield-Upper Goulburn area, the Colac-Winchelsea area and Ballarat.

The main varieties of improved pasture seeds grown in these districts are Victorian perennial ryegrass, Australian phalaris, currie cocksfoot and demeter fescue.

Growers in Mansfield are particularly enthusiastic about demeter fescue. According to Mansfield grower, Mr Lloyd Parks who is one of the largest growers in Australia, demeter fescue is proving to be superior to most other perennial temperate species in a wide range of climates.

"It is one of the newer pasture grass species and is gaining widespread acceptance throughout Australia because of its superiority.

"It is unfortunate that many farmers tend to be slow in accepting new pasture species and persist in using traditional grasses in their pasture seed mixes."

He said that demeter fescue was probably the most exciting grass that had become readily available in recent years.

It had enormous potential under both dryland and irrigation conditions.

"It produces an enormous bulk of seed, is easily established, non-toxic and drought resistant.

"What is more, stock really love it," said Mr Parks.

control unwanted plant species.

During the growing season, weather is all-important to the success of the crop. A dry autumn or a late or dry spring can have serious effects.

Harvesting begins in early December and finishes by the end of January.

First the paddocks of seed are inspected by department certification officers and on approval

the grower is authorised to harvest certified seed.

Then the pressure is really on. The seed crops must be windrowed at once to avoid losses from shattering.

The crop is windrowed with self-propelled windrowers. "All-crop" harvesters pick up the crop, thresh the seed and auger it into bulk bins.

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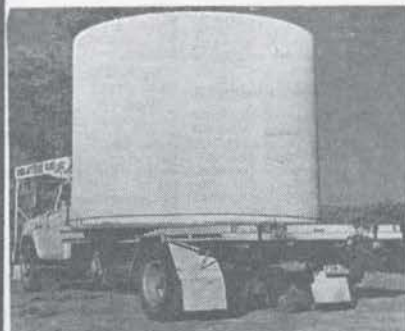
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THE SEED cleaning plant on Mr Lloyd Park's property at Mansfield. Seed is fed into the machine on the left and the "offal" is collected in bags. Seed cleaner, Mr Laurie Kingsbury of Mansfield, stacks bags of cleaned seed which are marked with the "line" number. On the right is Mr Park's son, Scott.

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Departmental authority must again be given before the seed is allowed to be shifted from the paddocks to the cleaning works.

Cleaning, like harvesting, is an entirely mechanical operation.

Graham sends the bulk of his seed to a cleaning

plant owned by a leading seed producer in the area. Other growers use plants in Benalla and Albury.

Department certification officers supervise all cleaning processes.

Seed lines are cleaned individually and are kept separate.

They are then bagged and the bags sown and

marked with a line number.

Department officers sample the bags and send the samples to the seed testing station at Burnley Gardens in Melbourne.

At Burnley the seed is tested for purity and germination. If the required standards are met, the sample is tagged and sealed, and an analysis certificate issued.

On the tag there is enough information for any purchaser to refer to the Department of Agriculture and ascertain the origin, purity and germination of the seed.

The original seed may then be sold as certified seed.

Graham markets his seed through Mansfield Seed Pty Ltd — a company formed three years ago by growers.

"Because of the expertise involved in marketing and the day-to-day fluctuations in the market, the growers felt they could not adequately handle their own sales.

"The company, which is owned by 24 grower-shareholders, represents a more rational approach to marketing the seed," said Graham.

The company consists of a board of directors (all growers), an administrative officer (an accountant), a marketing manager and a professional marketing agent, Mr Ray McPherson of Benalla.

Marketing policy is controlled by the Board of directors and the day-to-day sales by the marketing manager.

The company is a wholesale seller of pasture seed and sells to seed merchants and shopkeepers.

Small amounts of phalaris, currie cocksfoot and demeter fescue are sold overseas.

Mansfield Seed Pty Ltd is already the biggest marketer of ryegrass in Australia. Last year it sold 1000 tonnes of pasture seeds including 850 tonnes of perennial ryegrass.

Chairman of the company, Mr Robert Friday of "Arcadia" Mansfield, said the company was working well.

"Last year was the big test.

"With the slump in rural income, people stopped buying seed.

"It was also a year when seed production was well above normal and prices plummeted down.

"It was a very difficult year, but the growers are satisfied with the way the company has given stability to the industry.

According to Mr Friday, only half the usual amount of seed will be produced in the district this year because of the large carry-over and the low prices received last year.

Another factor which would reduce the amount produced, he said, was the 25 per cent increase in department certification charges in September last year.

"The pasture seed industry is the keystone of all agricultural grazing industries," said Mr Friday.

"But this is often overlooked.

"Showing down of improved pastures is a long term investment.

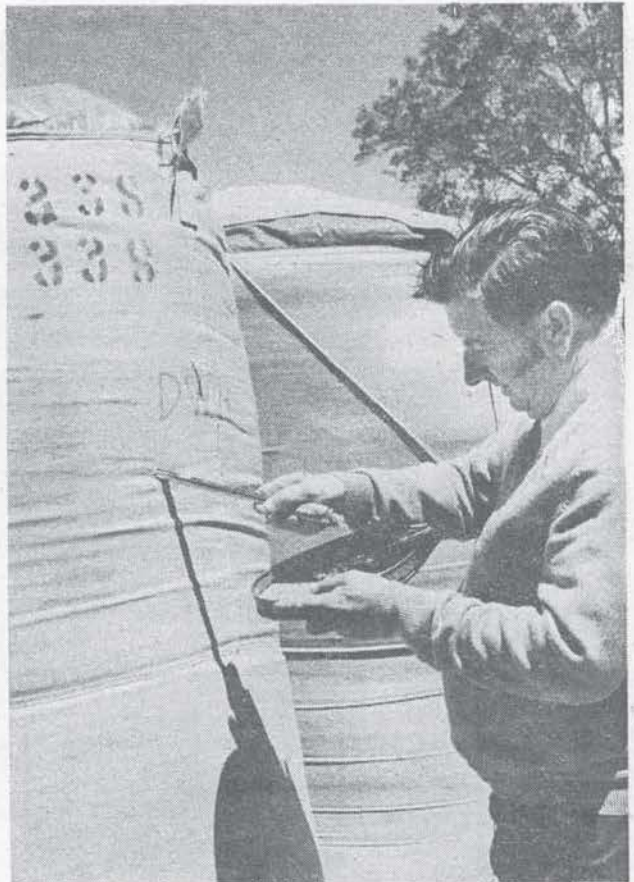
"Initially there is a high capital cost involved but the outlay for the seed content of the operation is relatively small.

"For this reason, farmers should always buy good certified seed.

"Locally produced seed is better than imported seed for the simple reason that the local seed is acclimatised and the pasture will be established more easily.

"Farmers are having to pay high prices for fertilizer.

"They should realise that the maximum benefit of super is achieved on improved pastures," said Mr Friday.



BULKERS of seed are sampled by Department of Agriculture officers and the samples sent to the seed testing station at Burnley Gardens. Here acting senior seeds inspector at Burnley, Mr Noel Franklin, takes a core sample.

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