



“SEED CLEANING, DRYING AND STORAGE”

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Executive Summary

ORGANISED TOUR

Everywhere I travelled agriculture in general was struggling due to low world commodity prices, even countries with agricultural subsidies. This was especially so in the United Kingdom as subsidies were changing to be more environmentally related. In Brussels the term “multifunctionality” was frequently used which simply means that farmers are paid for benefits they bring to society rather than for their production, eg paying to make the countryside look good for people in the city. Environmental considerations seem to be playing a much greater role to the point where supermarkets are dictating to farmers how they perceive consumers want their food to be produced.

As Tasmania finds it difficult to compete in commodity markets I took particular interest in how farmers were getting around low prices. There was a constant theme over the whole trip which was best stated by one UK farmer “If the consumer won’t pay more (and they usually won’t) you either:

- (1) Increase efficiency,
- (2) Shorten the supply chain or
- (3) Produce alternatives to commodity produce.

SEED CLEANING, DRYING AND STORAGE

The purpose of my study was to investigate opportunities for Tasmania in the seed industry particularly in the development of cleaning, drying and storage of grass seed.

Tasmania has a cool temperate climate and is ideally suited to most temperate seed crops. As more seed is grown there is an increasing demand for seed to be dried. At present there are only a small number of driers in the state with only one or two able to dry grass seed.

At present there are only four main cleaners that can clean most crops, with a small number set up to do specific crops. As the seed industry has diversified to a number of crops coupled with the small number of cleaners, each plant must be able to clean a variety of seeds ranging from poppy seed to large white lupins.

There is very little on-farm storage, especially amongst seed growers. Consequently, seed cleaners need to store virtually all the seed straight off the header.

As highlighted in the organised tour section farmers around the world are looking for alternatives to commodity production. The seed industry offers increased prospects for Tasmanian farmers. There are many opportunities especially with respect to contra seed production where seed from northern hemisphere countries is shipped south to grow a second crop in the same year. To do this and get the best yields and quality you need to get far enough south with a late season and similar growing conditions to the main northern hemisphere countries. There are relatively few areas in the world suitable. These include parts of Argentina and Chile in South America, part of the south island of New Zealand and Tasmania and southern Victoria in Australia. This puts Tasmania in a very good position on a world scale.

This is especially the case with genetically modified (GM) crops as new varieties can be created quickly but still need to be multiplied in the conventional manner. Contra production can halve the time to get a new variety on to the market. This has occurred in Tasmania with canola seed production in trial quantities over the past two years.

At the moment however, there is a moratorium on growing GM crops set by the Tasmanian State Government to determine the implications of growing GM crops in Tasmania. From what I have found on this tour, Tasmania has much to gain, particularly in the seed industry by the use of GM crops.

Regardless of whether GM crops are introduced or not the Tasmanian seed industry has been expanding over the last few years. To remain a reliable supplier of seed, major improvements are needed in seed cleaning, drying and storage capacity.

Except for the Madras area in Oregon much of the infrastructure needed is spread between farmers and seed processors in the main seed areas I visited. This is not the case in Tasmania with smaller farms and shorter history of seed production, infrastructure has been concentrated in a relatively few number of cleaning plants. This is especially so with seed drying which is essential to be a reliable supplier of seed in the unpredictable Tasmanian climate.

The seed cleaning plants already in Tasmania have considerable scope for expansion. In this respect I have highlighted a variety of methods of seed cleaning, drying and storage that are in current use overseas as well as many alternatives not yet in mainstream use but may have possibilities in the specific Tasmanian situation. Many of these ideas I intend to use in my own seed cleaning plant.

The Madras area of Oregon, USA has developed much like the Tasmanian industry of concentrated cleaning, drying and storage. As with there, it is unlikely that there will be a great increase in drying and storage by farmers. It is therefore up to the cleaning plants to increase capacity and introduce drying facilities as the seed industry continues to expand.

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