WHAT DOES THE SEED TAG TELL?

By F. B. Ledeboer, *Ph.D.*

The seed tag as we know it today is there to protect the consumer against fraudulent producers or marketers of all types of seed. It is also there on each and every seed container to monitor quality standards as required by law. To avoid confusion comments made here pertain primarily to turf seeds even though many regulations are also applicable to other types of seed.

Prior to our modern technological sophistication even in agricultural production, grass seed was a by-product of pasture and forage agriculture and seeds originating out of this harvesting program were of highly doubtful quality at best. Modern specialization in production, harvesting and cleaning techniques have vastly improved seed quality, but were it not for constant supervision and monitoring by state and federal officials, low quality seed could easily be sold fraudulently at falsely elevated prices.

The seed tag is the ID tag for quality of seed which must be clearly exhibited on every shipping container.

Various colored tags will be observed primarily on large bags. These coded colors refer to specific quality standards for individual varieties only and are not applicable to mixtures. If a variety meets certain quality standards in the production field as well as in the seed bag it can be "certified" and is allowed to carry a blue certification tag. The states of Washington and Idaho also issue gold tags for seed lots with exceptional purity and complete lack of weeds. Seed of this quality also carries a higher price tag, of course.

While other tag colors will appear, they are not officially designating quality standards but are rather used to identify brands or mixtures of various merchandisers. Seed of regular quality that meets the regulations of the Federal Seed Act generally carries a white or manila tag.

At least one tag on each container has to show the official analysis made at a state or federal seed laboratory. Certification (blue or sod-quality gold) are attached in addition.

The analysis tag should show the following:

1. Kind of seed contained.
   —if it is a mixture of several, all have to be indicated by percent of each.
2. Purity of seed given in percent.
   —this is normal looking seed
   —in a mixture the percentages of other components also have to be stated. (See 1 above)
3. Germination of pure seed given in percent.
   —from 2 and 3 the real quality factor of seed can easily be determined as pure live seed (PLS) by multiplying Purity X Germination. This gives the amount of seed per 100 lbs. that is expected to grow.
4. Inert Matter content given in percent.
   —This portion contains all broken seeds, chaff, sand, and other non-living matter.
5. Weed Content in percent as determined by a representative sample.
   —noxious weeds are given in actual counts for each species and each has to be identified separately.
   —no certified seed (blue tag) is allowed to contain noxious weed seeds.
6. Other Crop content in percent.
   —this is seed of a different crop species that is not considered a weed.
   —the percentage of the other crop has to be below 5% to be listed here.
   —if the percentage is greater the seed has to be shipped as a mixture.
7. Origin.
   —this will indicate in which state the seed was grown but does not identify the shipper.
8. Lot Number.
   —each farm field receives a different lot number.
   —this identifies the grower and his field in case of reclamations.
   —all seed of a lot is generally shipped as a whole until it gets to the retail trade.
9. Test Date.
   —this date indicates when all the determinations listed above were made.
   —in particular it refers to the date of germination determination.
   —in some instances even the laboratory where the analyses were made is given or is identified by a test number.
10. Net Weight.
    —the net weight of each shipping container has to be stated on the tag (for bags) or label (for boxes).
11. The Shipping Firm.
    —the shipping firm who holds the official test results has to be identified.

Special Test: In the case of perennial ryegrasses a so-called fluoresence test is required to clearly identify and determine how much contamination by annual ryegrass exists. Seedlings are subjected to a special fluorescent light under which the annual types will glow while those of the perennial will not.

The results are given in percent.

The *Seed Tag* really gives the seed you buy a full I.D. and you should fully understand it to be able to buy wisely based on the purposes for which you intend to use it.

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