

Profile:

SEEDS OF SUCCESS: OSECO INC.

By Shirley Lessard
Brampton Times

The seed industry is a fascinating business, one that is absolutely vital to the world's survival, said Gabriel Eros, the president of Oseco Inc., of Brampton, though its impact on the food chain is not immediately apparent to the man on the street.

"Seeds are the beginning of all food production."

However, the industry's low profile hides a highly specialized industry within the agricultural market. Within the seed industry, seeds are grown for cereal and oil products, flowers, vegetables, corn, trees, and ground cover.

Each seed process and market requires special knowledge. Oseco, on Wandless Road off Highway 10, specializes in turf grass and forage seeds. It's a market the company has been involved in since 1939. Today, the company has grown and imports about 40 per cent of its seeds from markets all over the world.

Eros built his company by selling to countries such as Japan, New Zealand, Western Europe, the United States and Australia — countries with climates similar to Canada's.

"If seeds grow well here, we know they'll do well there."

The business, started by his father, John and his wife Margaret, both Hungarian immigrants, was originally called Ontario Seed Cleaners and Dealers Ltd.

"My father was an expert in seed cleaning, the process of removing

impurities picked up during harvesting. He set up the seed cleaning business in Toronto and it has grown into the merchandising business we own today."

Eros said the seeds were put through an elaborate process to clean them, making their seeds the "best product on the market." It was a system that kept them in business, at a time when the market was just beginning to grow.

In 1961, the founder of Ontario Seed Cleaner died of a heart attack leaving Eros, at the age of 25, to run the company. Although the company changed its name and moved to Brampton from Toronto in 1967, the method of cleaning seeds remains virtually the same. Only the amount of seeds cleaned, the technical equipment and the growth of business has changed, he said.

In its 22 years in Brampton, after several expansions, Oseco has grown from 40,000 square feet to a 70,000 square-foot building with warehouse and office space. Two subsidiary companies, Canadian Seed Coater Ltd., with a main plant in North Battleford, Sask., and Paladin Hybrids Inc., which has its head office in Brampton and laboratory facilities in Ottawa, are in the Oseco building.

"But it took a lot of effort to get here. It did not come easy. Our growth has been a combination of selling good, new products and good service."

The company has diversified to include a complete range of seed coatings and conola seeds, said Ervin Fox, a member of the Brampton Board of Trade business development committee, which

awarded Oseco a Business Achievement Award in May, 1989.

Oseco is a major participant in a multi-million dollar research program now underway to develop new and improved products, Eros says.

The Oseco company is used as a testing facility for all new experimental varieties. Eros says, this bio-technical research has led to molecular techniques to make new hybrid seeds.

Shortly after Eros moved to Brampton, he originated the bulk movement of seeds across the nation in rail hoppers rather than by bags, Fox said.

The unprocessed seeds arrive in bulk from contract growers and are stored in unheated warehouses. They are sold in packages of 1000 grams to containers which hold one tonne of grain.

Oseco is a wholesale company which sells to retailers, who in turn sell to farmers who do the seeding. There are 70 full-time employees and from five to 10 seasonal employees.

The seed industry has changed since Oseco moved to Brampton. Eros says there are many different varieties available today because his company and others have gone into scientific plant breeding.

The changes in the hybrid seed industry have complicated Eros' life but "have provided better choices for customers," he says.

He advises anyone going into the business to learn "something about agronomy. The seed business requires a lot of special training, knowledge of seeds and a head for business."