Dear Rochelle

Dear Rochelle,
I see under the National Standards that I am going to be required to use organic seed and can only resort to untreated non-organic seed if organic is not commercially available. This is going to create more work for me and my suppliers. Why is this requirement being added to our standard?
Shaking my head in Rutland

Dear Shaking,
This is one of those topics where there appears to be no obvious win-win, but bear with me. First off this requirement was part of the voluntary 1999 Canada Standards, so this is not a new constraint being imposed by the National Standard. BC's voluntary provincial standard only recommended using organic seeds and allowed growers to use non-organic untreated seed without substantiation of availability. This was done because the COABC membership was extensively canvassed during the last Standards Review Process and it was clear there was minimal availability of the seed varieties most growers were using and seed-saving skills were in their infancy.

But times have changed, as not only are there more organic seed varieties available through various channels, many BC growers have been developing their own seed strains and are busy saving seeds.

We also needed to align our standard with the USA and European Union. "The USDA published regulations on organic farming at the end of 2000 and implemented in October 2002 (USDA, 2000). Among other things, the regulations require that organic farmers plant organic seed if it is commercially available. A similar set of regulations was developed in the European Union. As a result, seed companies began to contract for the organic production of seed."[1]

Initially both the US and the EU were liberally granting organic seed exemptions initially but "the EU ended exemptions for organic seeds in 2003, and member states of the EU are required to establish a registry of organically produced seeds. US certifiers are also more strictly enforcing the USDA organic seed ruling and establishing organic seed registries.[1]" Quoting one BC grower that I know quite well: "Buying organic seed grows the organic seed market, and supports the expertise to provide such seeds."

As you can see, if we don't make it a requirement to at least use organic seed when you find what you want and require continued searching for organic seed, how do we ever get this seed supply developed? It's like the chicken and egg scenario. If the seeds don't exist, you can't use them, but if you don't create a demand for them will they ever exist? And if we don't go this route why would seed houses carry organic seeds if no one needs to use them? Probably the biggest limiting factor for maintaining organic seed supplies right now is maintaining a wide enough selection of regionally appropriate adaptive seed varieties meeting everyone's needs; I am hopeful this will come with time.

And yes this requirement will add some work to the certification process for farmers, suppliers and certification agencies, until we do have an organic seed supply in place. The complex part of the equation is how to assess "commercially unavailable". To me this means if the seed variety/strain you want to grow because it is suitable to your location and conditions as well as appropriate for your marketing strategy is unavailable, and you have practiced your due diligence searching and can demonstrate this effort in your farm records, then that variety for that season is "commercially unavailable". Don't forget this effort will have to be repeated annually.

Just so you know I don't believe this will stop you from using up already purchased non-organic seed supplies that have been previously allowed by your certification agency, especially if you present a clear plan of action to your certifier as to how you plan to

move forward and increase your organic seed supply. It would be best to explain how much inventory you have on hand of each variety, plus list the current availability of organic equivalents. If organic is available it would be good to project how long it will take to use up your existing inventory. It would probably also be appropriate to include information on any arrangements you have made to help develop the organic seed supply, such as your plans to save seed on-farm (list the varieties planned), ordering seed from other organic producers, and participate in on-farm seed research as there is still a lot of work to be done. Of course, this approach is only my idea and each CB will have to set a policy to guide them through this transition period, so do speak to your certifier before ordering your seeds for 2009.

1. History of Organic Seed by Brian Baker http://seed.hort.oregonstate.edu/content/history-organic-seed.

2. History of Organic Seed by Brian Baker http://seed.hort.oregonstate.edu/content/history-organic-seed.

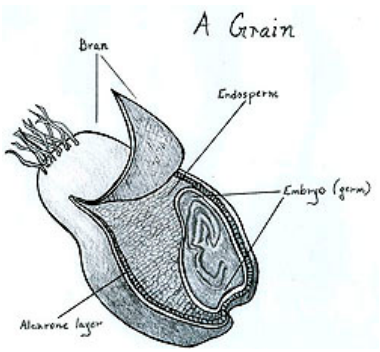
British Columbia Seed Database http://www.bcseeds.org/dborganic.php
Cyber-Help Seed Database http://www.certifiedorganic.bc.ca/rcbtoa/services/seeds-sources.html
OMRI's Organic Seed Database http://seeds.omri.org/index.php?action=customerintro
UK's Organic X Seeds database http://www.organicxseeds.com/oxs/do/Login

The Anatomy of Cereal Seed: *Optimizing grain quality involves getting the right proportions within the seed*

by Andy Hammermeister, Ph.D., P.Ag

Knowing about grain quality starts with knowing the anatomy of a single grain. Whether the grain is to be used for feed or for human consumption, the key characteristics of a grain still apply. Have you ever wondered how the anatomy of a grain affects its quality characteristics? The figure below shows the anatomy of a typical grain. Here we will discuss the parts of seed from the inside out starting with the embryo.

The embryo, also known as the germ, is the beginnings of a New plant, including the genetics, and early plant structures (leaves and roots) that will get the plant started. The embryo contains various protein, oils, enzymes and vitamins. It makes up approximately 3% of the seed. The enzymes it contains helps to trigger the release of nutrients from the remainder of the seed when the embryonic plant starts to grow.



The germ is typically removed during milling of refined flour because it can influence bread making quality, and the oils in the germ can go rancid if the flour is stored for a long time. Some millers/bakers such as Speerville Mill and the Dover mill, will mix the germ back into the flour (along with the bran discussed below) when making whole wheat bread.

The endosperm makes up 75-83% of the seed. It contains the starch which is held in a matrix of protein. This is the energy source of the seed