Quality Alfalfa Seed: A South Dakota Crop

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Quality Alfalfa Seed
A South Dakota Crop
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ALFALFA SEED is an important source of income on many central and western South Dakota farms. The market for this seed is largely in the northern half of the United States where farmers have learned that it is extremely important to know where the alfalfa seed was grown that is offered for sale. A brief survey of all recent alfalfa bulletins and information published by all northern Agricultural Experiment Stations should convince every South Dakota alfalfa seed grower that he has a good market for his alfalfa seed in these states for years to come if he will but produce dodder-free seed of high quality and send it to them in sealed bags, guaranteed as to variety and origin.

Markets for South Dakota Alfalfa Seed
The best and largest markets for South Dakota alfalfa seed are the northern states. (See Fig. 1.) These states have made large increases in their alfalfa acreages in recent years as shown in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>1919</th>
<th>1924</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>1919</th>
<th>1924</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>74,000</td>
<td>448,000</td>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>94,000</td>
<td>124,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>172,000</td>
<td>276,000</td>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>62,000</td>
<td>95,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>45,000</td>
<td>268,000</td>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>31,000</td>
<td>36,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>70,000</td>
<td>265,000</td>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>24,000</td>
<td>36,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>89,000</td>
<td>177,000</td>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>15,000</td>
<td>24,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>120,000</td>
<td>172,000</td>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>12,000</td>
<td>20,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These states must have a high protein hay for their livestock. Many of these states are great dairy states. They maintain many thousands of dairy cattle, and beef cattle and hogs are important sources of income.

South Dakota Competitors.—Alfalfa seed that is produced in South Dakota has to compete for a market with seed produced in many other states and in foreign countries. The following facts should prove to every South Dakota alfalfa seed grower that competition is becoming keener every year and that all growers should produce what-the-market-demands.

NORTHERN STATES: North Dakota, Montana, Idaho. These states produce hardy seed which is on a par with South Dakota seed.

CENTRAL STATES: Nebraska, Kansas, Colorado, Utah. Medium hardy seed. Not as good for the northern states as South Dakota seed.

SOUTHERN STATES: Arizona, New Mexico, California. Seed not hardy for the northern states.
FOREIGN SEED: Argentina, Turkestan, France, South Africa, Canada. Some of this seed is hardy and some not for the northern states. Canadian seed is generally very good. All foreign seed is now subject to staining under the new federal regulations. Imports have run up into millions of pounds every year and have cut the price on all ungraded seed.

Fig. 1.—These States Need South Dakota Alfalfa Seed

Market Classes and Varieties of Alfalfa Seed.—There are two principal classes of alfalfa seed, namely:

A. The group of variegated, true varieties of hardy seed: Varieties are Grimm, Cossack, Baltic, Canadian Variegated. To be genuine, the Grimm seed must trace back to the original fields of Wendelin Grimm, Carver county, Minnesota; the Cossack and Baltic to the Experiment Station, Brookings, South Dakota; and the Canadian Variegated to the original fields in Ontario, Canada. Seed of these varieties is demanded by the buyers in sealed sacks, produced on pedigreed or registered fields, and guaranteed by a responsible crop improvement or seed growers’ association as to genuineness of variety and origin.

B. The group of Common alfalfas: In this class, there are both hardy and non-hardy strains; either United States grown seed (domestic) or foreign grown seed (imported). Alfalfa seed of this group is generally offered for sale under some of the following terms:

Western S. D. No. 12: Also “Dakota No. 12” or “Dakota Common”. A very hardly strain in great demand in northern states. Northern Grown: Common alfalfa seed which is usually designated as “South Dakota grown,” “North Dakota grown” or “Montana grown.” All such seed is hardy if grown in any of these states. Mid-West: Also known as “Nebraska Common” or “Kansas Common.” Good alfalfa for the central states. Not as hardy as “Dakota No. 12.” Northwestern: Alfalfa seed sold under this term generally means Utah common. Such seed is not as hardy for the northern states as “Dakota No. 12.” Utah leads all other states in alfalfa seed production. Southwestern Common: Seed from Arizona, California and other southwestern states. None of the seed grown in these states is ever labeled as “Southwestern” when offered for sale in northern states. Like foreign grown seed, it is mixed with other seed and sold under some commonly used trade name.
Produce What the Market Wants

South Dakota growers should know the competition which they have to meet; also the markets for which they are producing alfalfa seed and what these markets are demanding. The market requirements may be summarized as follows:

1. Seed from hardy varieties.
2. Genuine true-to-name seed.
3. Clean seed of high quality.
4. No dodder in seed.
5. Sold at a reasonable price.

1. South Dakota growers can supply seed of the hardy kinds of alfalfa. Buyers can choose from the genuine Western South Dakota No. 12, Baltic, Cossack, or Grimm. Just now South Dakota grown alfalfa seed has an excellent name for hardiness and all growers should consider it a personal matter to do all in their power to keep this good name.

2. Alfalfa seed buyers of the Cossack or Grimm varieties are demanding proof of what they are getting. This is their privilege and South Dakota growers must meet this demand if they are to hold their markets. South Dakota growers can satisfy the markets on the question of genuineness by pedigreering their fields and seed and selling only in sealed bags. (This work is under the direction of the South Dakota Crop Improvement Association, Brookings, South Dakota, from whom particulars can be secured.)

3. Buyers of South Dakota alfalfa seed want it free from weed seeds, of a high germination, and of a good color. Many South Dakota alfalfa seed growers are entirely too careless about allowing weeds to grow in their fields and also about their seed harvesting and threshing methods. Every seed grower should so manage his field that he will produce a crop that can easily be put into proper shape to bring the highest market price. Good cleaning equipment can be used to put dirty, weedy and poor quality
alfalfa seed in fair shape to go onto the market but such work costs money and brings a smaller net return. Also, such seed can never be made to bring the highest market price.

4. No South Dakota alfalfa seed containing DODDER should ever be offered for sale, except as this fact is made known to the buyer. It is absolutely essential to the future prosperity of all South Dakota alfalfa seed growers that every "patch" of dodder in the seed producing fields in South Dakota be eradicated and that close watch be kept to see that no new areas get started. Every seed grower who has dodder in his fields and who fails to destroy it is an enemy to the alfalfa seed business. Dodder is a noxious weed which is legislated against in every state which makes up the market for South Dakota alfalfa seed.

To eradicate dodder it is first necessary to make a very careful examination of all alfalfa fields to locate all infested areas. Several trips over the field on horseback are necessary, once before cutting the first crop for hay, once before the second has come into bloom and once after the bloom has gone. All infested areas should be permanently marked by driving a wooden stake in the center of the spot, allowing four feet to stick above ground with a bright colored cloth attached. All alfalfa plants infested with dodder MUST be cut and burned before seed forms. Do this early. Watch these spots again next year and for several years thereafter. Also carefully examine any infected field for new areas.

Further facts in regard to dodder can be obtained by reading Farmers' Bulletin No. 1161 entitled, "DODDER." For a copy, write the U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C., or the Extension Service, State College Brookings, South Dakota.

Every alfalfa field producing seed should be inspected for noxious weeds. Weeds and a high quality of alfalfa seed cannot be produced on the same field. Alfalfa fields should be so managed as to get rid of the weeds or seed production should not be attempted. There is no profit in producing a weedy seed crop. It is more profitable to cut weedy fields for hay before the weed seeds are formed than to leave such fields for seed.

5. Farmers have learned that it pays to pay a premium price for good seed. They are willing to do this if they can get a guarantee with the seed as to hardiness-quality-variety and origin. Our competitors are organizing to do this. We must do it too. DO IT NOW!

Join the "Clean Alfalfa Seed Campaign".

![Image of sweet clover, alfalfa, and dodder seeds](image-url)

**Fig. 4.—Sweet Clover, left; Alfalfa, center; Dodder, right. These seeds are about the same size and are very difficult to separate.**

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