

Republic of Ireland: Annual Non-Organic Seed Authorisation Report for 2019

Authorisations to use seed and seed potatoes and vegetative propagating material not produced by the organic production method in organic farming

According to European Commission Regulation (EC) No 889/2008 of 5 September 2008, each member state should ensure that a database, in which seed, seed potatoes and vegetative propagating material produced by organic production methods, and respecting the general criteria for production of seed and vegetative propagating material can be registered and made available to users.



Prepared by the Soil Association
On behalf of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine

April 2020

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Introduction

This is the fourth report produced by the Soil Association for the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine, setting out the situation with regards to authorisations to use non-organic seeds issued by Irish organic control bodies to organic agricultural and horticultural operators in Ireland during the calendar year.

Purpose of the report

The non-organic annual seed authorisation report provides information on the quantities and varieties of non-organic seed used by organic farmers and growers in Ireland. This information is intended for use by the seed industry, producers, policy makers and organic control bodies (CBs) to increase use of organic seed and comply with EU regulatory requirements. The objective is to expand the diversity, quantity and quality of organic seed availability so that authorisations for the use of non-organic seed would only need to be given in extreme circumstances. The report also helps to make the sector transparent to buyers and suppliers of seed and consumers.

As a requirement of European Commission Regulation (EC) No 889/2008 of 5 September 2008, every Member State must produce an annual report publishing all authorisations (sometimes referred to as derogations) to use non-organic seed, non-organic seed potatoes and non-organic vegetative propagating material. For Ireland, the report is compiled by the Soil Association on behalf of the Department for Agriculture, Food and the Marine. It will then be sent to the European Commission and other Member States, and also made publicly available via the organic seed database (<https://ie.organicxseeds.com/>).

Context

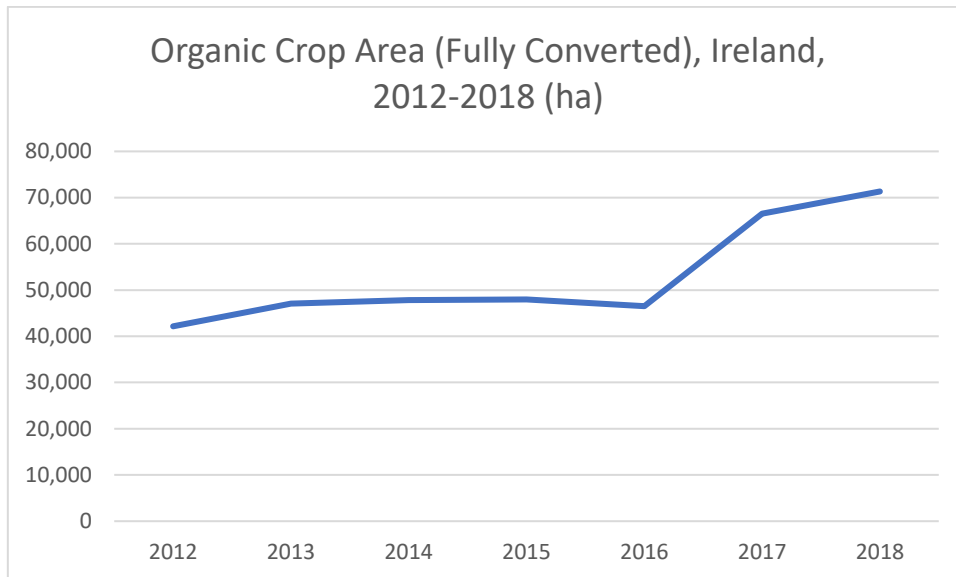
In common with many other countries across the globe, Ireland continues to experience growth in demand for organic food. According to Bord Bia¹ there has been an increasing trend through to 2017 (which remains the most recent year of available data).

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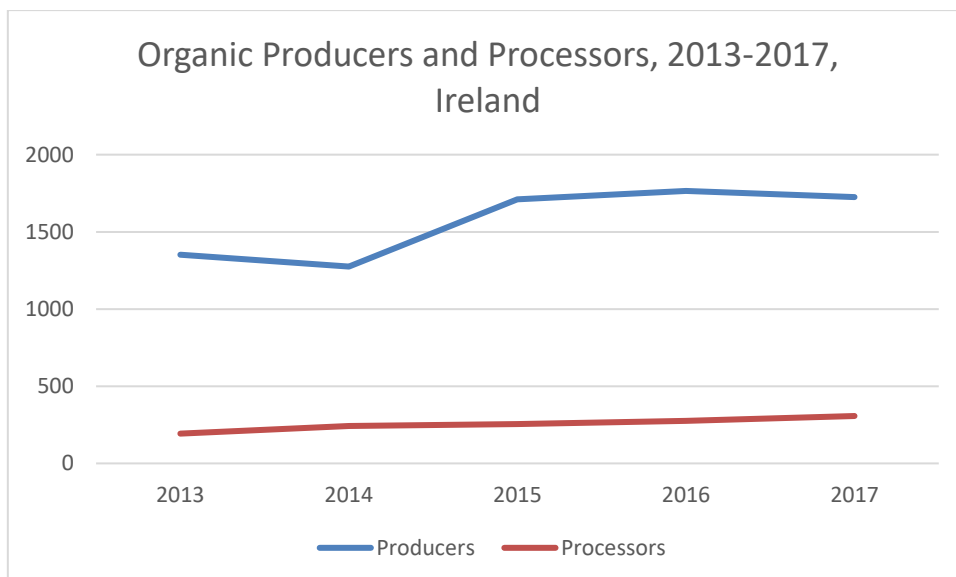
<https://www.bordbia.ie/industry/events/SpeakerPresentations/2017/OrganicMarketInformationDay/Ireland%20Organic%20Food%20and%20Drink%20Market%20Review%20-%20Iarlaith%20Corcoran,%20REDC.pdf>

Graphs 1 and 2 use data from *Eurostat*². This shows increases in the numbers of organic producers and processors as well as an increasing area of organically managed land. The 53% increase in organic land area between 2016 and 2018 is noteworthy.

Graph 1: Fully converted organic crop area, Ireland (ha)



Graph 2: Organic producers and processors, Ireland 2013-2017 (2018 data not available at time of writing)



² <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>

Table 1: Eurostat data underlying graphs 1 & 2³

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Fully converted organic land, (ha)	42,160	47,078	47,817	47,951	46,517	66,503	71,327
Number of Producers	-	1,351	1,275	1,710	1,765	1,725	-
Number of Processors	-	193	243	255	275	307	-

Summary of authorisations

The total number of non-organic seed, seed potato, and vegetative propagating material authorisations issued to organic farmers and growers in the Republic of Ireland during 2019 was **2,020**, an 11% decrease from 2018's figure of **2,268**. Previous years were: 2,063 (2017) and 2,096 (2016).

Varietal choice of seed is an ongoing concern; complying with the European Union's desire to reach 100% organic seed without compromising varietal choice is likely to be very difficult. Increased levels of non-organic seed use are undesirable within the organic sector as it challenges a key intention of the new EU Organic regulation which will come into force on 1st January 2021. It also risks creating two tiers of seed costs for farmers, potentially undermining public trust, despite the practical reasons that may be behind such an increase. Continued progress in organic seed production and usage is important to allow the organic sector to comply with regulatory requirements, protect public integrity and trust in organic food, and support continued innovation in organic seed production.

The report is analysed in five main sectors: seed potatoes, arable/cereal crops, horticulture, fruit, and grass/forage/fodder crops.

³ The corresponding section in the 2017 Non-organic authorisations report contained an error for the number of processors. The actual position is healthier than reported.

Seed Potatoes

38 authorisations were issued for non-organic seed potatoes in 2019, the same number as in 2018, but with an increased total of **45.9 tonnes**, up from **3.4 tonnes** used in 2018, though only slightly up from the 2017 total of 37 tonnes.

The authorisations for other varieties listed are mostly either blight resistant varieties (such as Belmonda and Almonda), which have been in relatively short supply as demand for them increases, or heritage varieties which are not always easy to find as organic seed.

Orla remains popular despite relatively low foliar resistance to late blight.

As noted in previous reports it is surprising to keep seeing varieties such as Pink Fir Apple which have a very poor blight resistance being grown organically in Ireland which has a climate that suits the disease.

Table 2: non-organic seed potatoes used in 2017-2019, comparison of top 12 2019 varieties

Variety	2017		2018		2019	
	auths	kg	auths	kg	auths	kg
Orla	1	20,000	1	38	1	36,000
Rooster	1	30	-	-	2	4,000
Belmonda	-	-	2	502	1	2,000
Almonda	-	-	-	-	1	2,000
Pink Fir Apple	5	570	5	490	6	917
Sharpes Xpress	5	200	6	337	7	402
Violetta	1	50	4	293	3	262
Salad Blue	5	430	3	375	2	75
Blue Danube	4	360	4	279	2	75
Swift	-	-	-	-	2	26
Premier	1	50	-	-	1	25
Red Duke of York	2	280	1	25	4	8

Arable and cereal crops

There were falls in both the number of authorisations for organic farmers to use non-organic seed in 2019, and in the number of tonnes of seed. The total number of authorisations fell from 301 to 245, and the total tonnage fell from 244.8 tonnes to 215.5 tonnes.

Oats remain the most popular cereal crop, and account for two thirds of the total tonnage of non-organic seed supplied under authorisation. However, authorisations fell back from 101 in 2018, to 77 in 2019, suggesting that more farmers have been able to source organic seed in 2019 though the tonnage of authorisations increased by some 12%.

The tonnage for wheat fell by 50% as did the number of authorisations, reflecting a better balancing of supply and demand of organic wheat seed. This also seems to be the case with barley, with authorisations halved to 22, and tonnage down to 30.2. Volumes of rye and triticale are too low to be able to identify any meaningful trends.

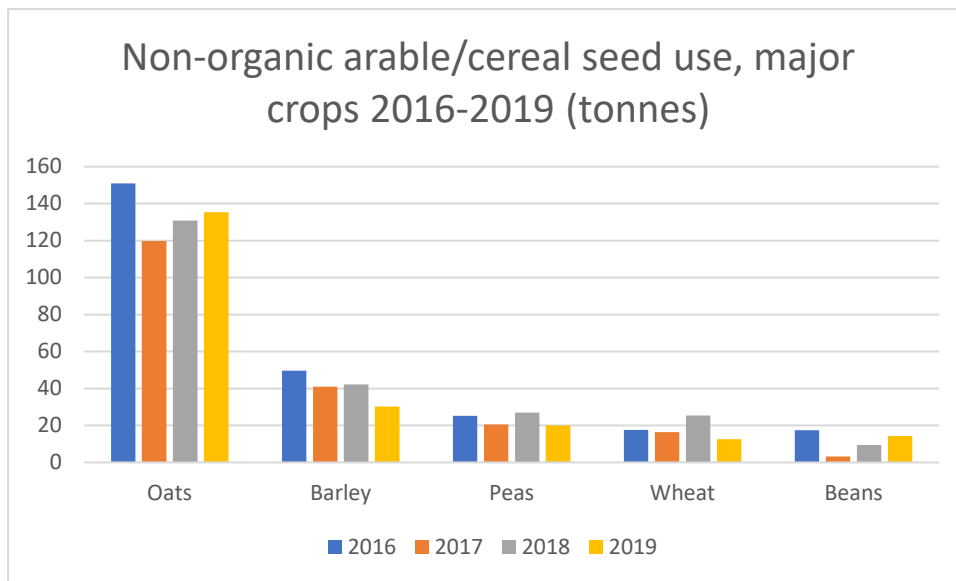
Pulses have diverged in 2019, with bean tonnage and authorisations increasing, and with peas level on authorisations, but decreasing in tonnage. Again, the totals are low; just 14.3 tonnes of beans, and 20 tonnes of peas.

Authorisations for Flax/linseed remain steady at 52, the third highest total behind oats and peas.

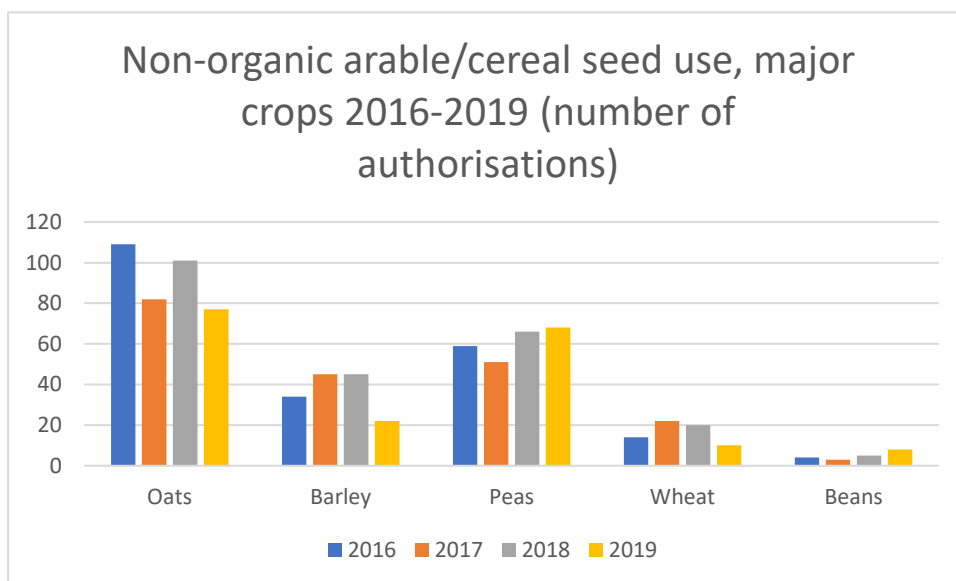
Table 3: Non-organic arable/cereal 2017-2019, comparison of selected varieties

Crop	2017		2018		2019	
	auths	tonnes	auths	tonnes	auths	tonnes
Oats	82	119.8	101	130.8	77	135.3
Barley	45	40.9	45	42.3	22	30.2
Peas	51	20.5	66	26.9	68	20.0
Beans	3	3.2	5	9.5	8	14.3
Wheat	22	16.4	20	25.5	10	12.6
Flax/linseed	47	1.4	48	1.2	52	2.1
Lupins	-	-	2	0.7	2	0.5
Triticale	2	0.31	6	0.4	4	0.4
Rye	2	0.152	8	7.5	2	0.2

Graph 3: Non-organic arable /cereal seed (tonnes) – major crops



Graph 4: Non-organic arable /cereal seed (authorisations) – major crops



Horticulture

The total number of authorisations issued by Irish organic control bodies during 2019 for all species in the horticultural sector was **625**. This is an increase of **97** (18%) from **529** in 2018. In terms of cropped area, 273 hectares were used for organic vegetable cultivation in 2018, a drop of 17% on the figure of 328 hectares for 2017 (*Eurostat* data). The lag in availability for land stats for the same year as our authorisation data continues to make it difficult to draw direct correlations between the two.

There is no clear picture when it comes to trends in individual crops. Many species have seen numbers of authorisations increase but overall volume or weight decrease, or vice versa. The overall horticultural market in Ireland is still small, and therefore individual decisions on one or two of the larger farms can have an impact on the overall picture.

Looking at individual crops there is a mixed picture with authorisations for some crops reducing and for others increasing.

Among those that have shown the biggest increase are:

- Beetroot – saw a 23% increase in number and 57% increase in seed number. And 59% increase in weight
- Lettuce – with an increase of 40% in number, 126% increase in seed number and 85% increase in weight
- Asia Greens – despite a small increase in actual number of authorisations and seeds, there was a 160% increase in authorisation by weight.
- Parsnip – saw an increase of 29% in numbers of authorisations, the number of seeds authorised also increased significantly by 190%
- Brussel Sprouts – there was a 160% increase in number of authorisations and a 299% increase in number of seed

Those showing the largest decrease in use are:

- Tomato –there has been further decreases this year in number of authorisations (of 12.5%) overall number of seeds (31%) and weight (73%).
- Cabbage – 6.3% reduction in number of authorisations, a 53% decrease in number of seeds
- Chard – saw a 33% decrease in number of authorisation and a 100% decrease in number and weight of seed
- Other crops such as radish and french bean also saw a reduction in authorisations.

**Table 4: Non-organic vegetable seed authorisations in Ireland, 2018-2019:
top crops by number of authorisations**

Crop	2018			2019		
	auths	seeds	kg	auths	seeds	kg
Tomato	48	5,001	0.011	42	3,450	0.003
Broccoli	32	631,040	0.010	34	771,050	0.002
Beetroot	26	2,192,950	1.880	32	3,444,945	3.000
Lettuce	22	56,300	0.451	31	127,300	0.835
Carrot	26	62,173,950	0.038	30	100,798,450	0.012
Kale/Borecole	37	155,900	17.581	29	225,851	5.725
Asia greens	27	501,400	22.435	29	508,100	58.305
Squash	14	5,020	0.030	20	6,386	-
Parsnip	14	1,433,700	0.025	18	4,158,450	0.766
Cauliflower	9	10,155	-	17	45,781	-
Onion	7	23,070	20.000	16	251,853.000	0.386
Cabbage	16	29,150	0.010	15	13,596.000	0.254
Brussels sprout	5	9,015	-	13	35,945	0.0002
Celery	9	6,250	-	12	56,350	-
Pak choi	3	-	0.03	12	24,000	4.060
Pea	9	201	5	10	900	6.75

Fruit

During 2019 the total number of authorisations for non-organic fruit seed and plant propagating material was **152**, an increase of 65% from the **92** from 2018 but a return to the 2017 levels of **142**.

In 2018 a total of 51 ha was recorded as being used for organic fruit production an increase of 4% from the 2017 of 53 ha⁴.

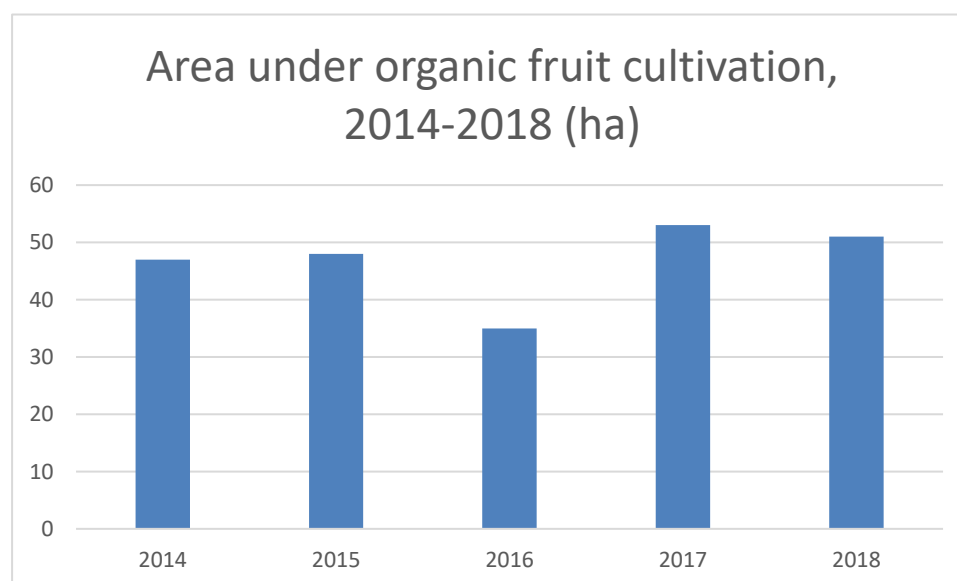
The small overall size of this sector makes it almost impossible to draw any concrete conclusions from three year's data. There were fewer authorisations for apples and strawberries, but an increase in authorisations for blueberries and raspberries.

⁴ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>

Table 5: Non-organic fruit authorisations in Ireland, selected crops, 2017-2019

Crop	2017			2018			2019		
	auths	amount		auths	amount		auths	amount	
Apple	61	2,552	plants	39	2,521	plants	37	138	plants
Apricot	-	-	-	1	1	plants	1	2	plants
Blackberry	-	-	-	1	8	plants	2	15	plants
Blackcurrant	3	35	plants	-	-	-	3	125	plants
Blueberry	19	3,080	plants	3	8	plants	25	950	plants
Cherry	-	-	-	5	10	plants	3	16	plants
Fig	1	2	plants	-	-	-	-	-	-
Gooseberry	4	145	plants	1	42	plants	6	32	plants
Grape	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Kiwi	-	-	-	1	1	plants	1	2	plants
Mulberry	-	-	-	2	3	plants	-	-	-
Passion Fruit	-	-	-	1	0.03	kg	-	-	-
Peach	1	2	plants	3	3	plants	2	2	plants
Pear	4	4	plants	6	39	plants	6	68	plants
Plum/Damson/Greengage	7	106	plants	11	67	plants	9	15	plants
Quince	-	-	-	3	5	plants	4	4	plants
Raspberry	12	455	plants	4	544	plants	8	681	plants
Red Currant	5	70	plants	-	-	-	-	-	-
Strawberry	23	3,030	plants	11	4,890	plants	16	3,020	plants
White Currant	3	50	plants	-	-	-	2	6	plants

Graph 5: Area under organic fruit cultivation, 2014-2018



Grass, forage and fodder crops

Grass

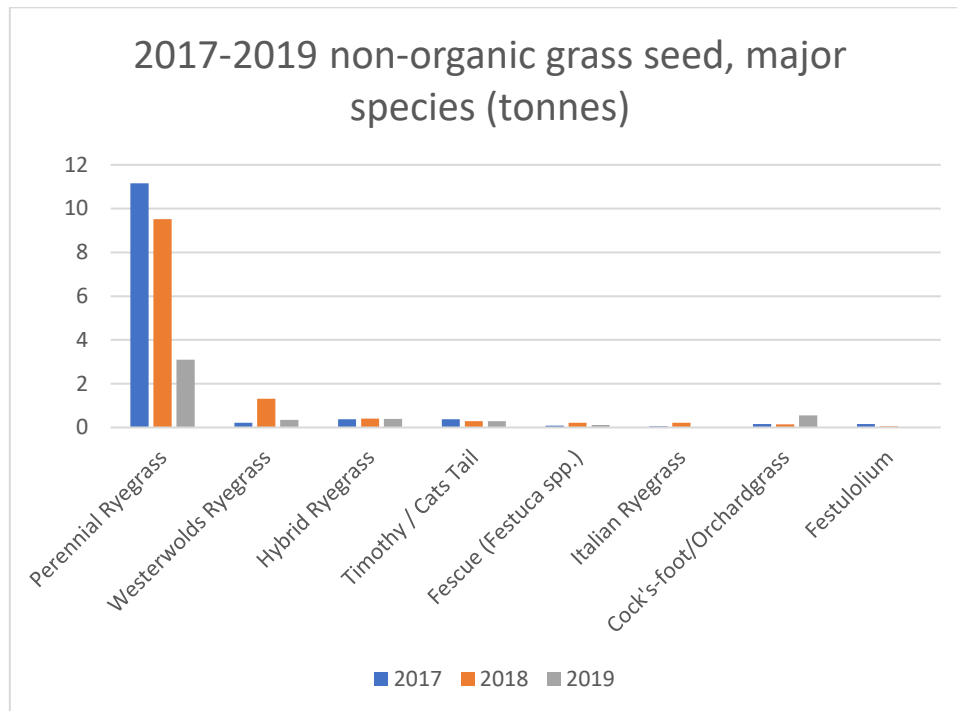
Perennial ryegrass remains the only grass seed of significant volume receiving authorisation for the use of non-organic seed. Here the tonnage of authorisations has decreased by over two-thirds compared to 2018 and the number of requests for derogations to use perennial ryegrass has halved. Westerwolds, Hybrid ryegrasses, Cocksfoot, Timothy and Fescue species remain at a low level of request.

There appears to be no authorisation of Italian ryegrass in 2019. This may have been due to a move to hybrid ryegrasses.

Table 6: Summary of non-organic grass seed authorisations in Ireland

Crop	2017		2018		2019	
	auths	tonnes	auths	tonnes	auths	tonnes
Perennial Ryegrass	298	11.158	291	9.522	142	3.098
Westerwolds Ryegrass	2	0.215	7	1.307	3	0.353
Hybrid Ryegrass	10	0.376	10	0.412	8	0.393
Timothy / Cats Tail	23	0.378	30	0.296	53	0.288
Fescue (<i>Festuca spp.</i>)	10	0.079	24	0.222	28	0.111
Italian Ryegrass	2	0.051	5	0.211	-	-
Cock's-foot/Orchardgrass	2	0.151	30	0.140	14	0.55
Festulolium	6	0.155	3	0.058	10	0.002
Colonial Bentgrass	1	0.001	2	0.003	-	-
Meadow Foxtail	-	-	-	-	2	0.002
Tall Oatgrass	-	-	-	-	8	0.004

Graph 6: Non-organic grass seed authorisations 2017-2019 (tonnes)



Fodder and forage

White and red clover remain the principle source of authorisations, though both are down on the previous two years. Vetch and crimson clover and black medick are also authorised in significant quantities. Some growers will be attempting to use these to suppress weeds in mixed horticultural cropping regimes, whilst providing longer term nitrate fertility to the area.

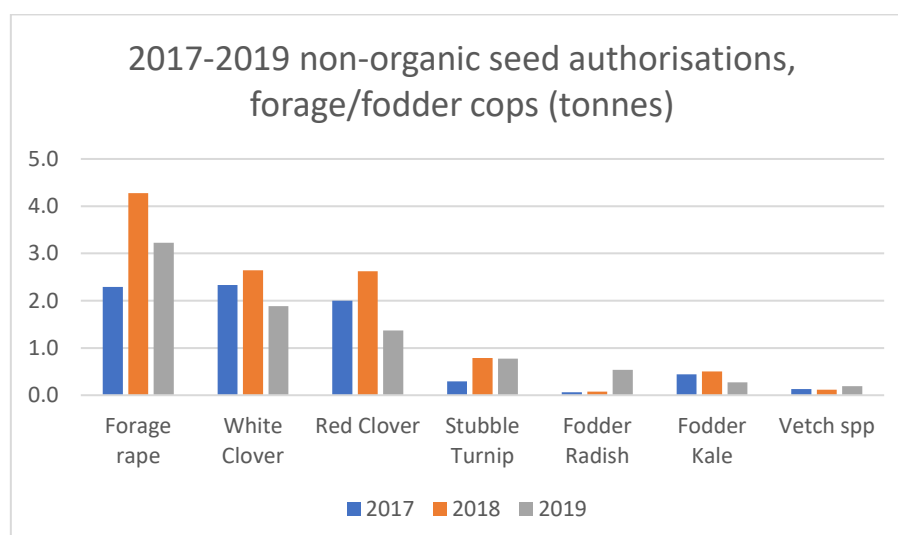
Note that fodder beet is normally sown at 80,000-100,000 seeds/ha. The authorisation of 750,000 seeds, represents an area on only 7.5ha – 9.3 ha.

Authorisation of fodder crops and the number of Kg issued are generally similar to, or below those of, 2018.

Table 7: Summary of non-organic forage and fodder seeds 2017-2019

Crop		2017		2018		2019	
		Auths	kg	Auths	kg	Auths	kg
Alfalfa (Lucerne)	<i>Medicago Sativa</i>	11	15.4	11	132.6	3	6.1
Alsike Clover	<i>Trifolium hybridum</i>	23	47.0	31	146.1	27	70.5
Birds Foot Trefoil	<i>Lotus Corniculatus</i>	14	104.0	9	47.3	6	4.6
Black Medic	<i>Medicago Lupulina</i>	8	9.6	33	72.0	20	111.3
Burnet	<i>Sanguisorba spp.</i>	12	40.0	16	36.1	15	15.4
Chicory	<i>Chichorium Intybus</i>	28	83.0	18	100.5	26	60.9
Plantain	<i>Plantago spp.</i>	22	44.0	25	74.8	22	23.8
Red Clover	<i>T. Pratense</i>	72	2,001.0	60	2,624.0	47	1,373.1
Sainfoin	<i>Onobrychis</i>	3	98.0	1	12.0	7	76.8
Subterranean clover	<i>T. Subterranean</i>	1	10.0	-	-	1	40.0
Sweet Clover	<i>Melilotus Albus</i>	1	7.5	-	-	-	-
Vetch spp	<i>Vicia</i>	3	132.0	3	120.0	3	188.5
White Clover	<i>Trifolium Repens</i>	267	2,331.0	304	2,645.4	235	1,887.4
Yellow Clover	<i>M. Officianalis</i>	12	18.0	-	-	-	-
Crimson Clover	<i>Trifolium Incarnatum</i>	2	50.0	5	37.3	6	153.5
<i>Brassica & other Species:</i>							
Fodder Kale	<i>B. Oleracea sabellica</i>	43	443.0	41	506.4	21	269.8
Forage rape	<i>B. Napus</i>	66	2,289.0	112	4,275.4	86	3,224.2
Stubble Turnip	<i>B. rapa</i>	17	291.0	21	789.3	18	772.2
Fodder Radish	<i>Raphanus sativa</i>	2	60.7	5	75.0	7	539.3
White Mustard	<i>Sinapsis Alba</i>	7	288.0	3	35.3	2	27.5
Fodder Beet	<i>Beta vulgaris</i>	-	-	1	50,000 (seeds)	2	750,000 (seeds)

Graph 7: Authorisations issued for non-organic forage / fodder seed (major crops) 2017-2019 (tonnes)



Trees

Although not technically within the regulation we have also collected information on authorisations for Trees. There were significant plantings in 2016 (though from a small number of authorisations) but subsequent years have only shown a few.

Table 8 Tree authorisations 2016-2019

2016	Auths	No. of plants	2017	Auths	No. of plants	2018	Auths	No. of plants	2019	Auths	No. of plants
Alder	2	550	Crab Apple	2	2	Hazel	1	3	Hazel	14	163
Beech	1	100	Walnut	1	3				Fir	1	15
Birch	1	125							Willow	1	200
Elder	1	100									
Haw thorn	4	3,350									
Holly	1	60									
Nordmann fir	1	7,500									
Row an	1	125									
Spruce	1	200									

The Irish organic seed database: ie.organicxseeds.com

The database is a requirement of EU Regulation (EC) No. 1452/2003 which regulates the use of seeds and seed potatoes in organic farming.

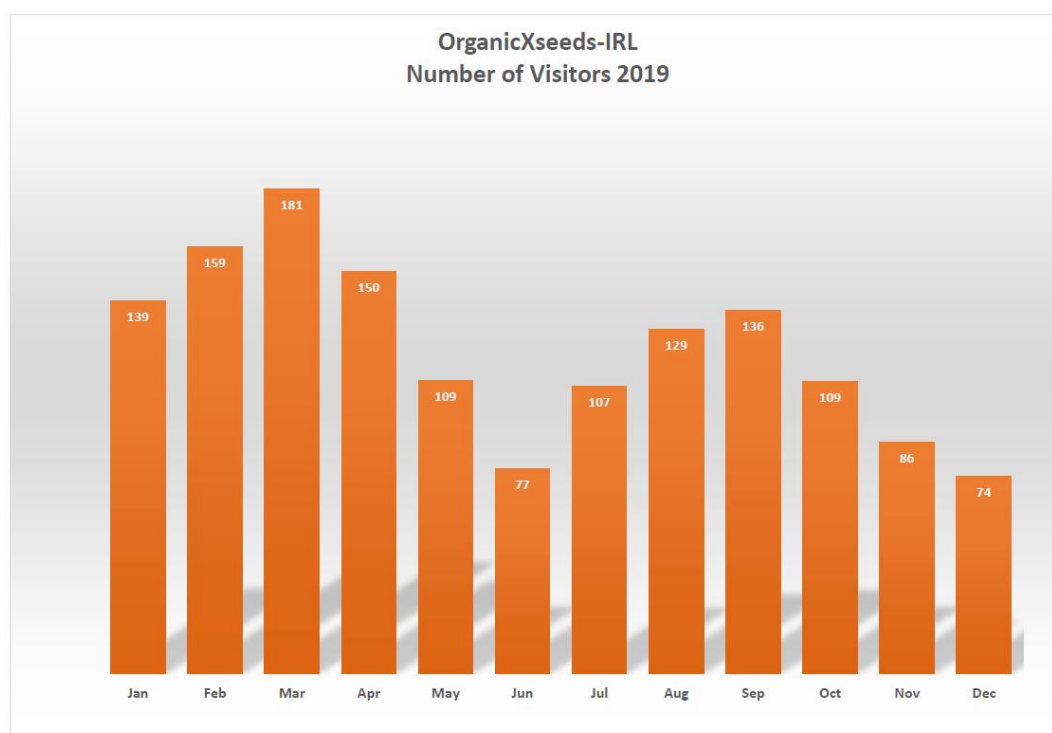
Launching in 2017, there are currently eleven seed companies registered in the database that are able to supply organic seed and/or organic seed potatoes to organic farmers and growers in Ireland.

Seed suppliers can register species of organic seed and/or organic seed potatoes by variety via a login and password.

Organic producers are legally obliged to use organic seed that is registered in the database. Irish control bodies are legally obliged to check the database for organic seed availability before issuing authorisations to use non-organic seed.

Statistics provided by [FiBL](#) relating to the Organic X Seeds website (which operates across several EU member states) can be viewed below:

Graph 8: Visitors to the OrganicXseeds website from the Republic of Ireland



During 2019 the Organic X Seeds database, which operates across several EU Member States, had an online availability of 99.5%.

Explanation of authorisation data

In accordance with Article 12 of Commission Regulation (EC) No 1452/2003 the report shall contain, for each species concerned by an authorisation according to Article 5(1), the following information:

- The scientific name of the species and the variety denomination
- The English or common name of the species and the variety denomination
- The justification for the authorisation indicated by a reference to Article 5(1)
- The total number of authorisations
- The total quantity of seed or seed potatoes involved
- The chemical treatment for phytosanitary purposes as referred to in Article 3(a)

Authorisation according to Article 5(1) for seed (agricultural crop)

Column 1

Scientific name of the species

Column 2

English or common name of the species

Column 3

Variety name

Column 4

Justification / Reason for authorisation

The justification for the authorisation is indicated by a reference to Article 5(1) (a), (b), (c) or (d)

- (a) If no variety of the species, which the user wants to obtain is registered in the database provided for in article 6;
- (b) If no supplier is able to deliver the seed or seed potatoes before sowing or planting in situations where the user has ordered the seed or seed potatoes in reasonable time;
- (c) If the variety which the user wants to obtain is not registered in the database, and the user is able to demonstrate that none of the registered alternatives of the same species are appropriate and that the authorisation therefore is significant for his production;
- (d) If it is justified for use in research, test in small-scale field trials or for variety conservation purposes agreed by the competent authority of the Member State;

Column 5

The chemical treatment for phytosanitary purposes

There are currently no chemical treatments allowed for phytosanitary purposes in Ireland.

Column 6

The total number of authorisations for each variety

Column 7

The total number of authorisations for each species

Column 8

The total quantity of seed, plants or seed potatoes (by variety)

For each variety it is stated, how many units of seed or vegetative propagating material have been authorised. Where two or more authorisations have been granted, the amounts have been added.

Column 9

The total quantity of seed or seed potatoes (by species)

Seed authorisation data

The accompanying document - "Ireland Non-Organic Seed Authorisation Report for 2019 Data" - summarises the authorisations granted in 2019 by all of the Irish organic control bodies.

There are some anomalies in the way that the data is collected by the control bodies. For example, the same variety of a particular crop may have some entries recorded by the number of seeds or plants and others by the weight of the seed. Where this has occurred, the entries have been added to give a total by each unit of measurement. Although the control bodies are aware of this, they often receive the request for authorisations in various units from the producer who in turn reads the information as provided by the seed company.

Acknowledgements

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Data compiled by Martin Parkinson. Seed working groups chaired by Ben Raskin and Adrian Steele.