

# Republic of Ireland: Annual Non-Organic Seed Authorisation Report for 2017

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

March 2018

## Contents

<u>Introduction</u>	Page 3
<u>Purpose of the report</u>	Page 3
<u>Context</u>	Page 4
<u>Summary of authorisations</u>	Page 4
<u>Seed potatoes</u>	Page 5
<u>Arable &amp; cereal crops</u>	Page 7
<u>Horticulture</u>	Page 9
<u>Fruit</u>	Page 11
<u>Grass, forage &amp; fodder seed</u>	Page 12
<u>Trees, Shrubs and Flowers</u>	Page 15
<u>Organic seed working groups</u>	Page 15
<u>The Irish organic seed database</u>	Page 16
<u>Explanation of authorisation data</u>	Page 17
<u>Seed authorisation data</u>	Page 18
<u>Acknowledgements</u>	Page 18

## Introduction

This is the second 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](#).

## Context

In common with many other countries across the globe, Ireland continues to experience growth in demand for organic food. Having remained relatively stable in preceding years, 2015/16 saw a rapid acceleration in the size of its organic market, with 6.9% expansion in 2015, and an increase of 23.7% in the 12 months to November 2016<sup>1</sup>. 2017 data shows overall continued growth though with some declines in the latter months of 2017. Full details can be found at the Bord Bia website<sup>2</sup>.

Between 2015 and 2016 the total area of organic and in-conversion land in Ireland increased by 5%. This is a significant reduction in the previous year's growth. Numbers of organic processors dropped by 31%<sup>3</sup> to 27, similar levels as seen in 2014. This is not mirrored in the UK where processor numbers continue to rise to 2804 in 2017, an increase of 14% from 2016

## 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 2017 was **2063**, a drop of 2% from the 2016 figure of 2096.

Varietal choice of seed is an ongoing concern, and establishing how the European Union reaches a 100% organic seed approach without compromising the varietal choice available to growers is unknown. Increased levels of non-organic seed use are undesirable within the organic sector as it challenges a key intention of the EU regulation. 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.

---

<sup>1</sup> Source: <http://www.bordbiavantage.ie/market-information/sector-overviews/organic-market/>

<sup>2</sup>

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

<sup>3</sup> Source: Eurostat - <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>

## Seed Potatoes

56 authorisations were issued for non-organic seed potatoes in 2017, this is up from 41 in 2016, with a total of **37 tonnes** which is down from 44 tonnes used in 2016.

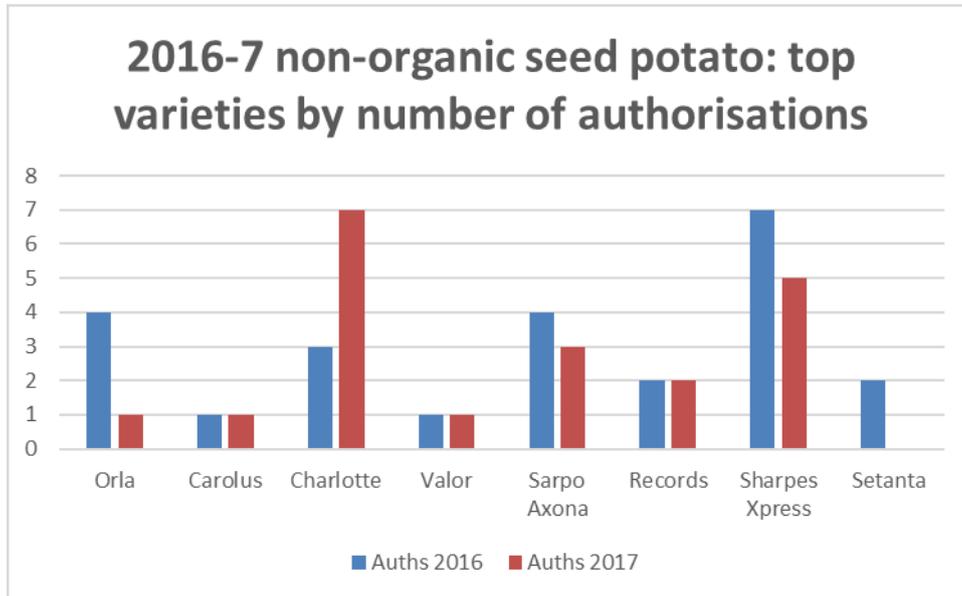
The variety with the largest increase in 2016 was Carolus. There was one tiny authorisation in 2015 but this has risen to one authorisation of 8 tonnes in 2017. As one of the leading blight resistant varieties available this is not surprising and there is hope that larger quantities of this variety will become available organically in due course.

There has been a reduction by volume in authorisations for Orla from 28 to 20 tonnes (29% reduction). Otherwise varieties have been relatively stable, though no authorisations for Setanta were granted compared to 5 tonnes in 2016.

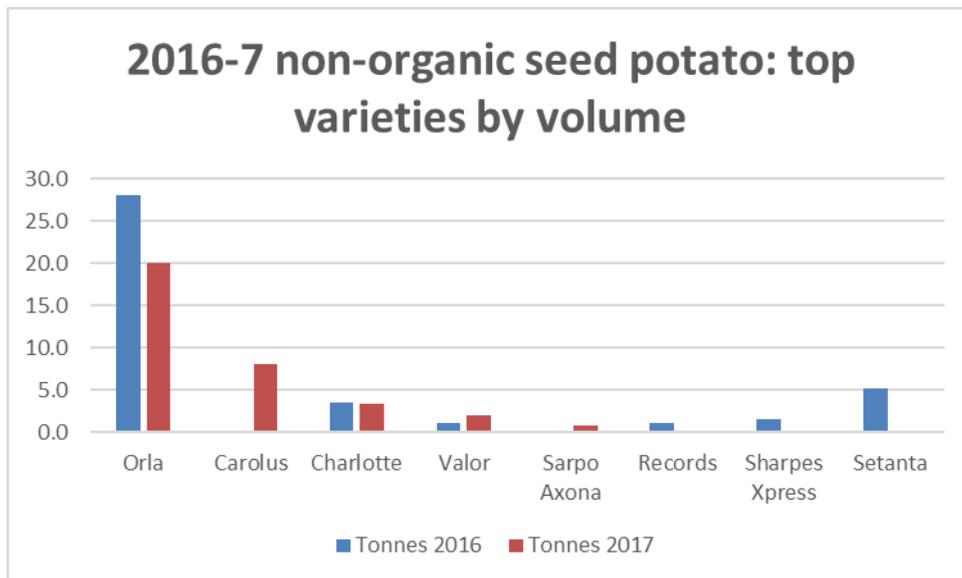
**Table 1: non-organic seed potatoes used in 2016 and 2017, comparison of selected varieties**

Variety	Auths 2016	Auths 2017	Tonnes 2016	Tonnes 2017
Orla	4	1	28.0	20.0
Carolus	1	1	0.0	8.0
Charlotte	3	7	3.5	3.4
Valor	1	1	1.0	2.0
Sarpo Axona	4	3	0.2	0.7
Records	2	2	1.0	0.1
Sharpes Xpress	7	5	1.5	0.2
Setanta	2	0	5.1	0.0

**Graph 1: Top five varieties (by authorisations) of non-organic seed potatoes used in 2016 and 2017**



**Graph 2: Top five varieties (by volume) of non-organic seed potatoes used in 2016 and 2017**



## Arable and cereal crops

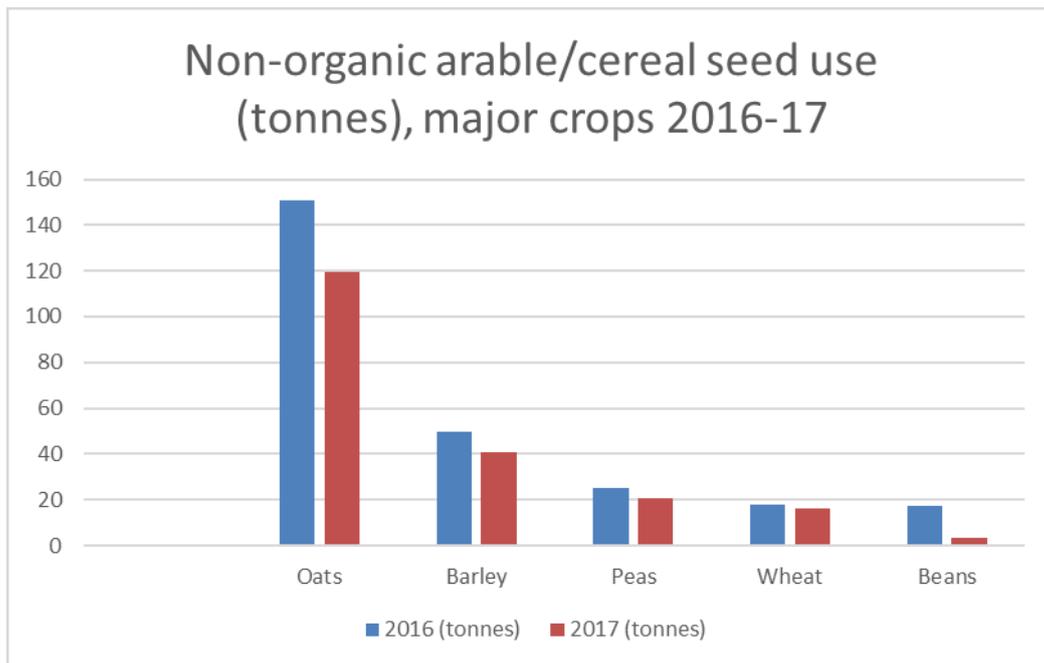
There were 250 non-organic seed authorisations for arable and cereal crops in 2017, an increase of 10% on 2016. However, this is distorted by a large number of authorisations (47) requested for Linseed but in all cases at low rates, implying their use in mixtures rather than as a crop. There was a reduction in tonnages of non-organic seed used from 266 to 202, a reduction of 24%.

Oats are far and away the most popular organic cereal grown in Ireland, with the majority going into human consumption outlets. Historically, one particular variety of oats has been required but this has now changed and in 2017 there was a large demand for seed from one variety of seeds first introduced into the conventional market in 2015. Having satisfied the millers requirements, this offers a new higher yielding variety to organic farmers who have responded by changing to this variety. However, there is a time-lag before oats seed growers can respond, increasing the non-organic seed authorisations for this variety to make up 72% of the oat authorisations requested. Hopefully seed producers will continue to increase production of sought after varieties, reducing the need for future authorisations. As the organic market in Ireland grows, organic seed businesses will continue to increase production of organic seeds for organic farmers.

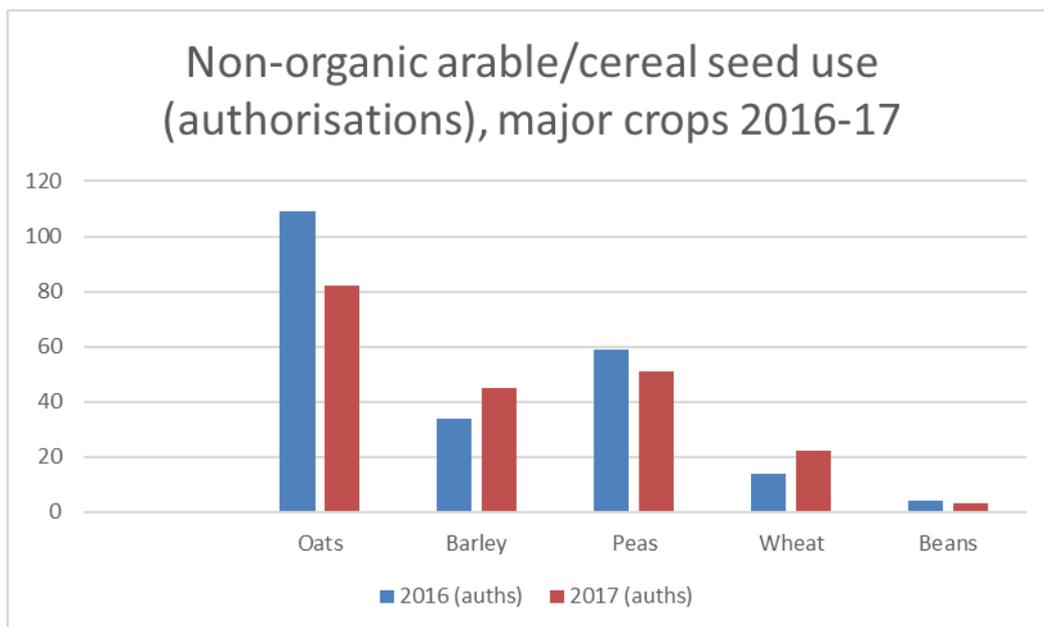
**Table 2: non-organic arable/cereal used in 2016 and 2017, comparison of selected varieties**

Crop	2016		2017	
	Tonnes	Auths	Tonnes	Auths
Oats	150.9	109	119.8	82
Barley	49.7	34	40.9	45
Peas	25.2	59	20.5	51
Wheat	17.6	14	16.4	22
Beans	17.5	4	3.2	3
Rye	3.1	4	0.152	2
Triticale	1.2	3	0.31	2
Lupins	0.8	4	-	-
Flax/linseed	-	-	1.4	47

**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 2017 for non-organic seed in the horticultural sector was **484**. This is a small increase of 9 from **474** in 2016. In terms of cropped area, 282 hectares were used for organic vegetable cultivation in 2016, a rise of 25% on the figure of 225 hectares for the previous year.

Overall the number of authorisations remains high compared to the UK; Irish growers requested 19% of the UK total, whilst the area of organic horticultural land in Ireland is only 2.7% of that in the UK.

Although we try to separate out crops specifically grown for horticulture using either quantity or variety, it is not always simple to disentangle (for example, kale and peas are also grown for forage purposes). Working closely with the Irish control bodies through the seed working groups will help us to improve the quality of the data as time goes on.

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 indeed visa 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:

- Lettuce, with an increase in both number and weight sold
- Pea, there has been a large increase in total weight however this is due entirely to one large authorisations for Garden Greenshaft.
- Beetroot – there was an increase in overall authorisations. The decrease in seed by number was outweighed by the large increase in seed sold by weight, meaning an overall increase in total authorisation.

Those showing the largest decrease in use are:

- Broccoli – The numbers are a little confusing as there has been an increase in seed bought by no. and a decrease in that bought by weight. However, because of the number of brassica seed per gram (approx. 300) there has been a significant reduction in overall use.
- Carrot.
- Squash – there was an increase in overall authorisations. Also the increase in seed number though high in percentage terms is low compared to the reduction in seed weights, meaning overall there was a reduction in non organic seed use.
- Kale has shown a decrease across board

It is hoped that with the introduction of an organic seed database in Ireland and the instigation of the annual report, the use of organic seed will begin to increase. The database makes it easier for Control Bodies to check availability, and the report will highlight opportunities for seed companies in particular crops.

**Table 3: Non-organic vegetable seed authorisations in Ireland, 2016-2017:  
Top 15 species by number**

2016				Crop Species	2017			
474 Authorisations*					483 Authorisations*			
No. of Auths	Seeds	Plants	kg		No. of Auths	Seeds	Plants	kg
44	5,189	1	0.001	Tomato	36	5,634		0.001
41	124,050		2.415	Kale	25	119,250		0.290
28	154,300		5.000	Broccoli	25	394,475		0.030
27	62,500		0.000	Lettuce - all types	29	180,800		10,002.320
25	56,925,020		0.776	Carrot	37	65,280,000		0.686
24	3,427,000		4.820	Beetroot	29	2,393,275		60.230
16	1,550,000		0.010	Parsnip	16	981,500		0.010
15	16,550		0.002	Cabbage - all types	10	30,530		0.035
14	10,850		19.075	Pea (incl. sugarsnap)	17	275		411
13	3,750		0.254	Squash, pumpkin (all)	24	4,435		0.105
13	23,000		2.213	Pak Choi	17	21,500		3.180
11	450,000		3.865	Swede	16	306,500		12.459
10	15,000		28.250	Chard	10	42,500		37.150
9	12,750		0.000	Brussel Sprouts	10	0		16,350.000
8	13,770		0.600	Cauliflower	13	20,000		0.003

*total - not just those listed here*

*\* in*

## Fruit

During 2017 in the fruit sector, the total number of authorisations for non-organic seed and plant propagating material was **142**. In 2016, a total of 34 hectares was recorded as being used for organic fruit production in Ireland, a reduction of 27.5% from the previous year, this despite some new plantings.

The small overall size of this sector makes it almost impossible to draw any concrete conclusions from two year's data. There were significant plantings of apples and blueberry as in 2017, and also some strawberries, though overall quantity is reduced from 2016. The only organic top fruit suppliers in the UK do not deliver to Ireland, which would make it harder to obtain organic stock. There would seem to be an opportunity for soft fruit suppliers and particularly blueberries to look to supply in Ireland.

**Table 4: Summary of non-organic fruit authorisations in Ireland**

Crop	2016		2017		Change 2016-17
		plants		plants	
Apple	3,838	plants	2,552	plants	-1,286
Blackcurrant	200	plants	35	plants	-165
Blueberry	4,836	plants	3,080	plants	-1,756
Cherry	11	plants	-	-	<i>new</i>
Fig	-	-	2	plants	<i>new</i>
Gooseberry	1	plants	145	plants	144
Grape	2	plants	-	-	<i>new</i>
Pear	66	plants	4	plants	-62
Plum, Damson	45	plants	106	plants	61
Raspberry	517	plants	455	plants	-62
Red Currant	-	-	70	plants	<i>new</i>
Strawberry	4,745	plants	3,030	plants	-1,715
White Currant	-	-	50	plants	<i>new</i>

## Grass, forage and fodder crops

### Grass

A total of 372 authorisations were given for grass seed in 2017, down from 417 in the previous year. There were also 413 authorisations for forage and fodder crops, down from 633 in the previous year.

The area of organic and in-conversion land in the Republic of Ireland in 2016 was 76,701 ha. (With 70,551 of this in permanent pasture)<sup>4</sup>. This was an increase from around 73,037 in 2015 and just over 51,871ha in 2014. Figures for 2017 are not yet available. This represents a five percent increase in organic land following the dramatic 40% increase of the previous year. At the October seed group meeting in Dublin there was concern that the lack of public financial support for conversion in 2017 had reduced the number of farmers opting for organic conversion. 30,412 ha were in-conversion in 2016, up from 25,087ha the previous year. Only 1.72% of total utilised agricultural land is farmed or in-conversion to organic, this compares to 2.82% in the UK and 6.69% in Europe.

No figure is given for the area of temporary grassland, it is likely that the 6,000ha of arable land includes some grass leys.

Perennial ryegrass authorisations increased from 8.98t in 2016 to 11.15t in 2017 (up 24%), a total of 298 authorisations. There were just ten hybrid ryegrass authorisations, a total of 376Kg, down from 1,422Kg and only two Italian Ryegrass authorisations for 51Kg, down from 237Kg the previous year. Westerwolds Ryegrass authorisations increased from 65Kg to 215Kg, still just two authorisations.

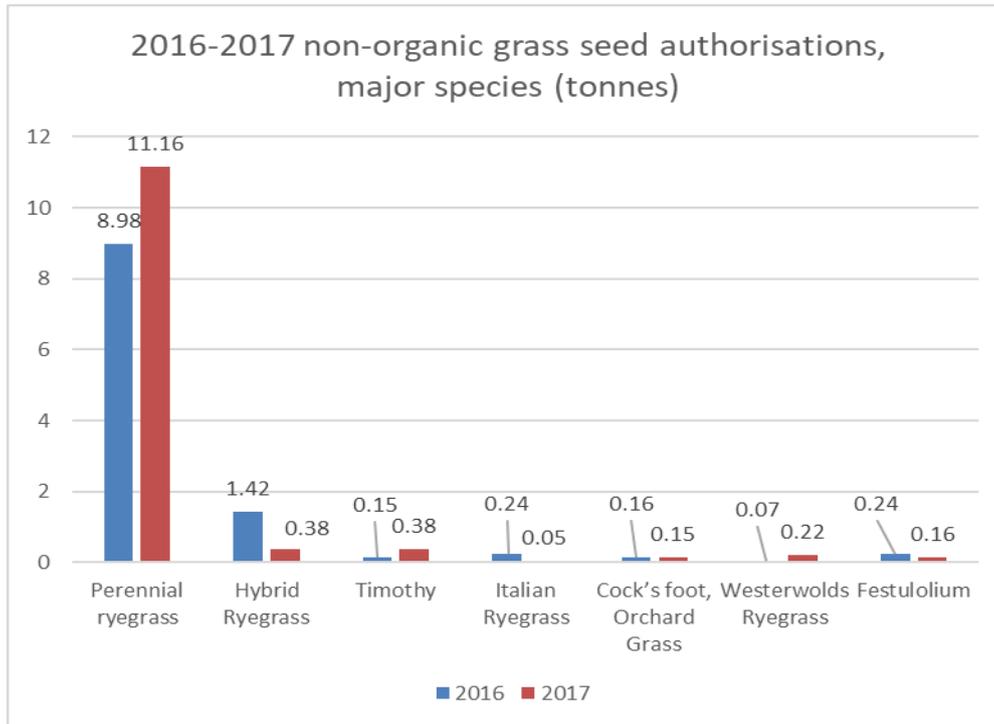
There were twenty-three authorisations for Timothy, an increase from 147Kg in 2016 to 378Kg in 2017. Though only a small amount, this will still represent a significant area. It is normally used at only 5Kg per hectare in grass mixtures, an extremely small seed with 2.5m seeds/Kg. Promesse was the most popular variety, though this was not always specified. Authorisation for Cocksfoot remained the same at around 150Kg.

Some of the less commonly used grasses were authorised. E.g. Red Fescue, normally associated with upland area, 23Kg, 5 authorisations. Meadow Fescue 55Kg, 4 authorisations; Smooth Stalked Meadow grass 108Kg, 28 authorisations.

---

<sup>4</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-datasets/-/org\\_cropar](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-datasets/-/org_cropar)

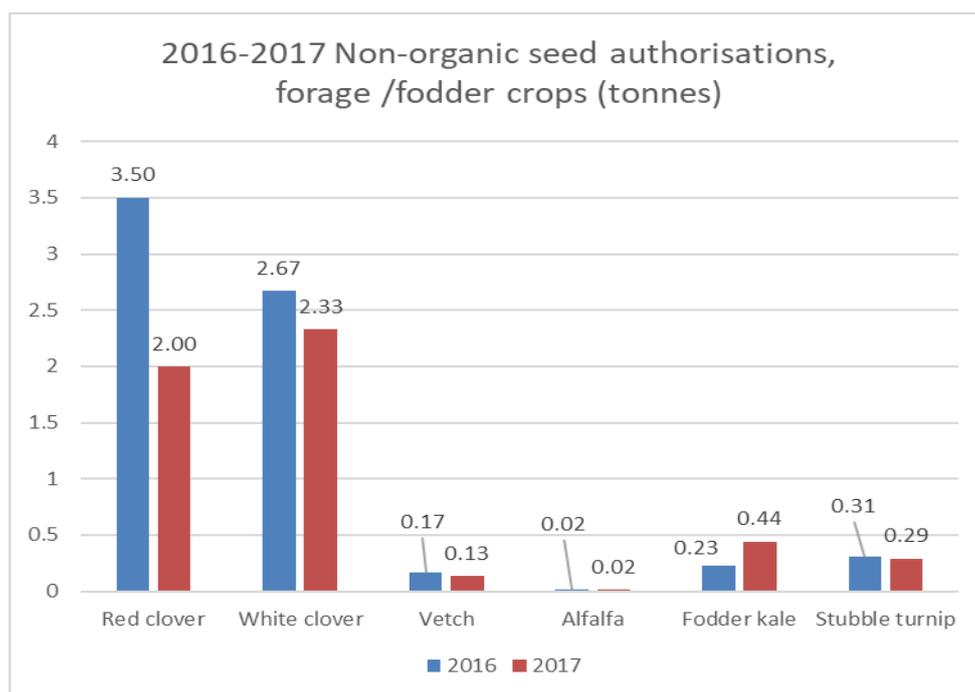
**Graph 5: Tonnage of non-organic grass seed authorisations in 2016**



### Fodder and forage

The majority of authorisations were for White and Red Clover, with 2,331Kg of white clover in 267 authorisations including 26 different varieties and 2001Kg of red clover, 72 authorisations, spread over 18 varieties. This was a substantial reduction on 2016, which included 2669Kg of White Clover and 3,503Kg of Red Clover. This is interesting as normally white clover authorisations rise in line with ryegrass authorisations to make up a grass clover ley. This suggest that the supply of organic white clover was greater than in past years.

**Graph 6: Authorisations issued for non-organic forage / fodder seed (major crops) in 2016**



**Table 5 Summary of non-organic forage and fodder seeds 2017**

Crop		Auths	kg
Alfalfa (Lucerne)	<i>Medicago Sativa</i>	11	15.4
Alsike Clover	<i>Trifolium hybridum</i>	23	47
Birds Foot Trefoil	<i>Lotus Corniculatus</i>	14	104
Black Medic	<i>Medicago Lupulina</i>	8	9.6
Burnet	<i>Sanguisorba spp.</i>	12	40
Chicory	<i>Chichorium Intybus</i>	28	83
Plantain (narrow)		22	44
Red Clover	<i>T. Pratense</i>	72	2001
Sainfoin	<i>Onobrychis</i>	3	98
Subterranean clover	<i>T. Subterranean</i>	1	10
Sweet Clover	<i>Melilotus Albus</i>	1	7.5
Vetch spp	<i>Vicia</i>	3	132
White Clover	<i>Trifolium Repens</i>	267	2331
Yellow Clover	<i>M. Officianalis</i>	12	18
<i>Brassica Species:</i>			
Fodder Kale	<i>B. Oleracea sabellica</i>	43	443
Forage rape	<i>B. Napus</i>	66	2289
Stubble Turnip	<i>B. rapa</i>	17	291
White Mustard	<i>Sinapsis Alba</i>	7	288

## Trees, Shrubs and Flowers

Control bodies record information on trees and ornamental plants as it is part of the requirement for authorisation for all non-organic propagation material planted on organic holdings. In reality there is little prospect of obtaining organic stock as the range of species is vast and most are required in relatively small quantities, making it very difficult for suppliers to opt for any variety.

There was a total of 39 authorisations given under this category in 2017, a decrease from 67 in the 2016. In 2016 the predominant sub-category, in terms of volume, was hedging and woodland species – for example authorisations were given for 3,350 Hawthorn plants and 7,500 Nordman Fir (Xmas trees). This has not been repeated this year which saw only 3 authorisations and total of 5 plants. However, as this is only the second year of this report, no conclusions as to trends can be drawn from this.

**Table 6(a) & (b) Tree authorisations 2016 and 2017**

2016	Auths	Number of plants	2017	Auths	Number of plants
Alder	2	550	Crab Apple	2	2
Beech	1	100	Walnut	1	3
Birch	1	125			
Elder	1	100			
Haw thorn	4	3,350			
Holly	1	60			
Nordmann fir	1	7,500			
Row an	1	125			
Spruce	1	200			

## Organic seed working groups

Chaired by the Soil Association, the seed working groups began in 2017 with two sessions carried out in the year. These sessions brought Irish seed suppliers, organic control bodies, organic farmers / growers, and representatives from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine together to discuss past authorisations - as well as assessing the current volume and diversity of organic seed available to Irish farmers and growers.

A session was planned to meet with FiBL in early 2018, which had to be postponed due to adverse weather in March 2018.

## Seed for seed production

The EU regulation does not require information to be obtained from organic control bodies relating to authorisations given for seed for seed production. However, it is planned to include this data in future reports.

## The Irish organic seed database: [ie.organicxseeds.com](http://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 ten 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](http://www.fibl.org) relating to the Organic X Seeds website (which operates across several EU member states) can be viewed below:



Germany	66,8%
United Kingdom	7,5%
Belgium	7,0%
Switzerland	5,6%
Sweden	4,9%
Ireland	1,3%
Luxembourg	0,3%
Others	6,6%

The percentage of visitors to the OrganicXseeds from Ireland in 2017 was 0.013

During 2017 the Organic X Seeds database, which operates across several EU Member States, had an online availability of 99.3%.

## 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 2017 Data" - summarises the authorisations granted in 2017 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**

Report compiled by Martin Parkinson, Liz Bowles, Ben Raskin, Jerry Alford and Paul Flynn.  
Data compiled by Martin Parkinson. Seed working groups chaired by Liz Bowles and Ben Raskin.