

# Republic of Ireland: Annual Non-Organic Seed Authorisation Report for 2020

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 2021

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## Introduction

This is the fifth 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 Bia<sup>1</sup> the COVID pandemic has seen a notable increase in purchase of organic produce (27% of research respondents buying organic food once or more times per week) with a total value of €189 million. The most recent available direct sales value (2017) is €44 million.<sup>2</sup>

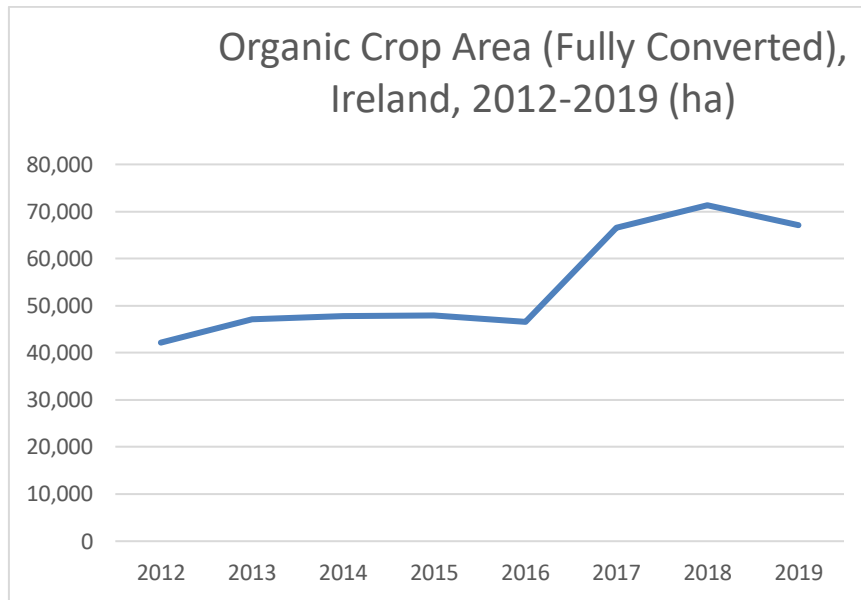
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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bordbia.ie/industry/news/press-releases/organic-awards-2020/>

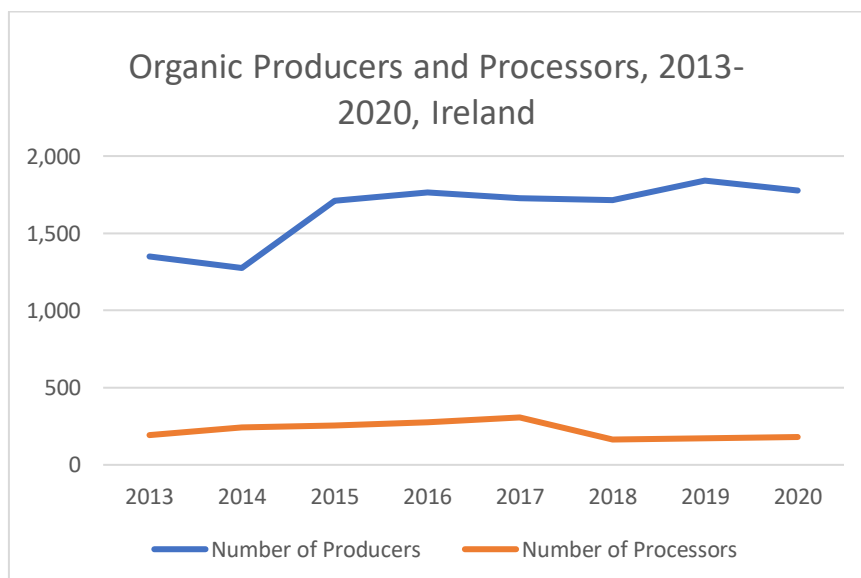
<sup>2</sup> <https://assets.gov.ie/101045/c4a42921-2530-470b-bda3-ac87229c53aa.pdf> page 10

Graphs 1 and 2 use data from *Eurostat*<sup>3</sup>. The 53% increase in organic land area between 2016 and 2018 is noteworthy and the slight drop in area from 2018-19 does not necessarily negate the overall upward trend since 2012.

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



**Graph 2: Organic producers and processors, Ireland 2013-2020**



<sup>3</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>

**Table 1: Eurostat data underlying graphs 1 & 2<sup>4,5</sup>**

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
<b>Fully converted organic land, (ha)</b>	42,160	47,078	47,817	47,951	46,517	66,503	71,327	67,063	-
<b>Number of Producers</b>	-	1,351	1,275	1,710	1,765	1,725	1,716	1,841	1,778
<b>Number of Processors</b>	-	193	243	255	275	307	164	170	179

## 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 2020 was **2,668** an increase of 32% from 2019's figure of 2,020. Previous years were: 2268 (2018) 2,063 (2017) and 2096 (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, the implementation of which has been postponed and is now expected to come into force 1<sup>st</sup> January 2022. It also risks creating two tiers of seed costs for farmers, potentially undermining public trust, despite the practical reasons that may be behind these differences. 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>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> Producer and processor figures for 2018-20 obtained from DAFM, all other figures from *Eurostat*

## Seed Potatoes

In total 27 authorisations were issued for non-organic seed potatoes in 2020 a -29% decrease on 2019. However, authorisations by weight saw an increase of 29% taking the total to 59.3 tonnes.

Trends in variety derogations remain similar to previous years with *Orla* clearly dominating authorisations by weight (56 tonnes) and *Pink Fir Apple* receiving the highest number of authorisations (5). Along with *Charlotte* these varieties exhibit poor resistance to blight, particularly foliar, which makes them potentially a risky choice for organic growers. Choice of these varieties might, however, be a result of contracted choice of varieties.

The temporary prohibition on import of seed potatoes from GB into the EU mean that we could see a shift in varieties available in the coming year.

**Table 2: non-organic seed potatoes used in 2018-2020, comparison of top 15 2020 varieties**

Variety	2018		2019		2020	
	auths	kg	auths	kg	auths	kg
Orla	1	38	1	36,000	1	56,000
Charlotte	-	-	-	-	3	1,575
Pink Fir Apple	5	490	6	917	5	528
Mayan Gold	1	25	-	-	4	479
Highland Burgundy	3	350	-	-	1	250
Sharpes Xpress	6	337	7	402	2	150
British Queens	-	-	-	-	2	100
Salad Blue	3	375	2	75	1	75
International Kidney	-	-	-	-	1	50
Kerr Pinks	-	-	1	*	1	25
Axona	4	594	-	-	1	20
Cara	-	-	-	-	1	5
Rooster	-	-	2	4,000	1	5
Lady Christl	-	-	-	-	1	4
Duke of York	-	-	1	25	1	2

\* authorisation for 9 tubers only

## Arable and cereal crops

There were increases in both the number of authorisations for organic farmers to use non-organic seed in 2020, and in the number of tonnes of seed. The total number of authorisations rose from 245 to 279, and the total tonnage rose from 215.5 tonnes to 247 tonnes.

Oats remain the most popular cereal crop, and account for 80% of the total tonnage of non-organic seed supplied under authorisation. However, authorisations nearly doubled from 77 in 2019, to 134 in 2020, and tonnages reaching almost 200 tonnes compared with 135 in 2019. This high value distorts the picture because authorisations for barley, wheat and triticale fell from 43.2 tonnes to only 7.51 tonnes.

The tonnage for wheat fell by 50% although the number of authorisations remained similar to 2019, reflecting a better balancing of supply and demand of organic wheat seed. This also seems to be the case with barley, with authorisations dropping to 8 from 22, and tonnage down to only 7 from 30. Volumes of rye and triticale derogations were very low but there does seem some increasing interest in rye as well as 'heritage' varieties of wheat such as Einkorn and Emmer.

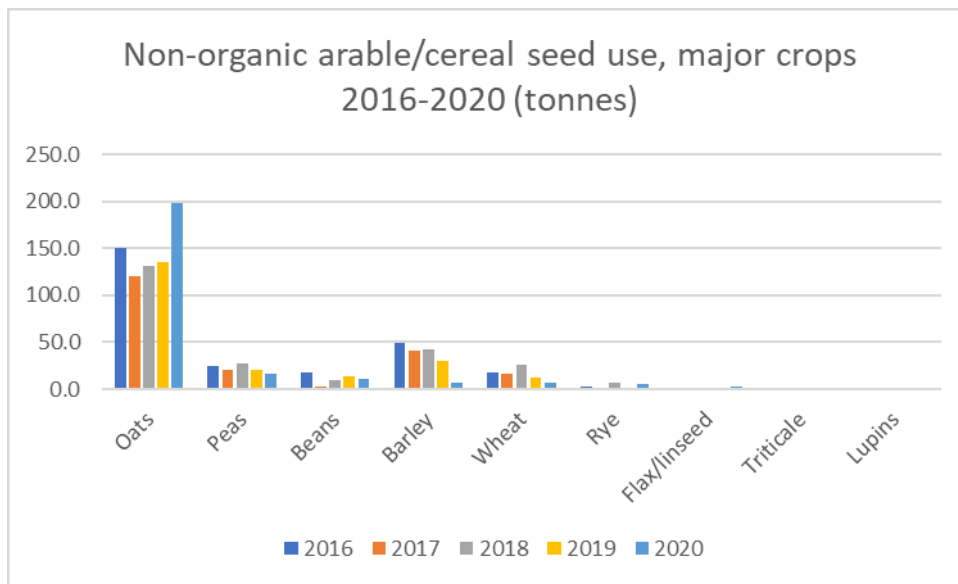
Pulses have fallen slightly in 2020, with pea tonnage and authorisations decreasing, and with beans level on authorisations, but decreasing in tonnage. Again, the totals are low; just 11.0 tonnes of beans, and 16.3 tonnes of peas.

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

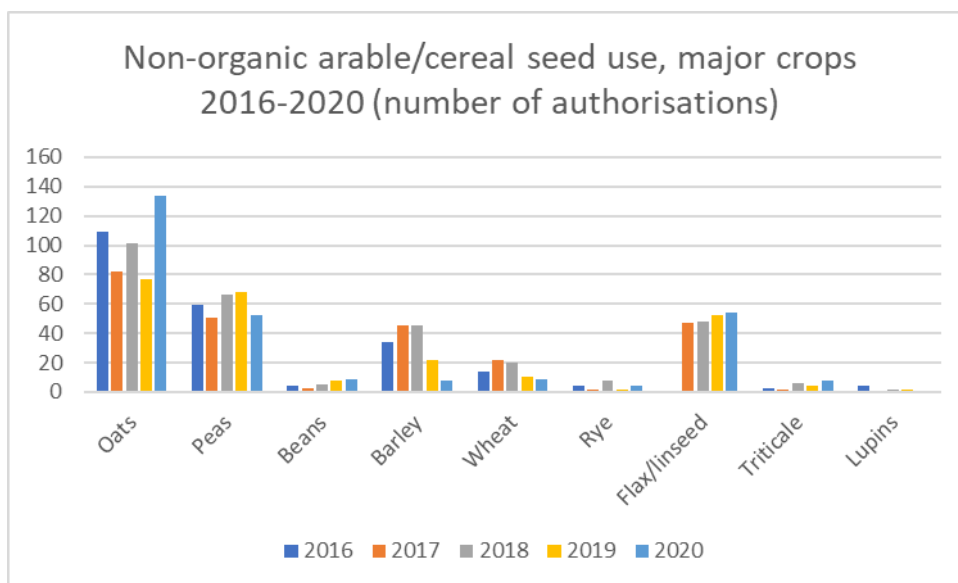
**Table 3: Non-organic arable/cereal 2018-2020, comparison of selected species**

Crop	2018		2019		2020	
	auths	tonnes	auths	tonnes	auths	tonnes
Oats	101	130.8	77	135.3	134	197.9
Peas	66	26.9	68	20.0	52	16.3
Beans	5	9.5	8	14.3	9	11.0
Barley	45	42.3	22	30.2	8	7.0
Wheat	20	25.5	10	12.6	9	6.7
Rye	8	7.5	2	0.2	4	5.0
Flax/linseed	48	1.2	52	2.1	54	2.3
Triticale	6	0.4	4	0.4	8	0.9
Lupins	2	0.7	2	0.5	1	0.4
Wheat > Durum	-	-	-	-	1	0.3
Wheat > Einkorn	-	-	-	-	1	0.2
Wheat > Emmer	-	-	-	-	1	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 2020 for all species in the horticultural sector was 604. This is a slight decrease of 21 (-3%) from 625 in 2019. In terms of cropped area, 367 hectares were used for organic cultivation in 2019, an increase of 34% on the figure of 273 hectares for 2018<sup>6</sup>.

There is no clear picture when it comes to trends in individual crops. The overall horticultural market in Ireland is still small, and therefore individual decisions on one or two of the larger farms can have a large 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:

- Broad Bean – saw a 300% increase in number of authorisations and a 20,210% increase in weight
- Sweetcorn/maize – an increase of 78% in authorisations with 131% increase in number of seed
- Cauliflower – saw a 94% increase in seed number and 29% increase in the number of authorisations
- Squash – despite a large increase of 70% in authorisations seed numbers rose by only 7.3%
- Cabbage – whilst the seed numbers increase by 365% the actual authorisation numbers declined by 3 from 15 to 12.
- Pea – saw a 60% rise in authorisations but seed numbers dropped by 81%

Those showing the largest decrease in use are:

- Asia Greens – had the largest decrease (-62%) in authorisations and a 98% decrease in seed numbers
- Brussel sprouts – also saw a decrease of 62% in authorisations but only 19% decrease in seed numbers
- Celery – a decrease of 50% in authorisations and 78% in seed numbers
- Further smaller decreases could be seen in pak choi, courgette and broccoli

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<sup>6</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>

**Table 4: Non-organic vegetable seed authorisations in Ireland, 2019-2020:  
top crops by number of authorisations**

Crop	2019			2020		
	auths	seeds	kg	auths	seeds	kg
Tomato	42	3,450	0.003	59	3,786	0.007
Lettuce	31	127,300	0.835	39	94,137	4.540
Carrot	30	100,798,450	0.012	37	102,496,094	-
Squash	20	6,386	-	34	6,852	0
Broccoli	34	771,050	0.002	33	665,892	-
Kale/Borecole	29	225,851	5.725	32	165,010	25.000
Cauliflower	17	45,781	-	22	88,943	-
Beetroot	32	3,444,945	3.000	21	3,974,495	1.000
Pea	10	900	6.75	16	167	53.7
Parsnip	18	4,158,450	0.766	14	5,402,800	5.850
Cabbage (all types)	15	13,596	0.254	12	63,166	-
Broad bean	3	160	5	12	240	1015.5
Asia greens	29	508,100	58.305	11	10,350	33.830
Onion	16	251,853.000	0.386	10	2,950.000	284.953
Courgette	14	3,619	-	10	2,398	0.054
Pak choi	12	24,000	4.060	8	5,125	0.500
Celery	12	56,350	-	6	12,700	1
Brussels sprout	13	35,945	0.0002	5	29,250	-

## Fruit

During 2020 the total number of authorisations for non-organic fruit seed and plant propagating material was 118, a decrease of -22% from 152 in 2019.

Whilst the number of authorisations were similar in certain categories, the number of plants authorised fluctuated. For example, authorisations for apple stayed the same at 37 but increased in number of plants by 175% from 138 to 379.

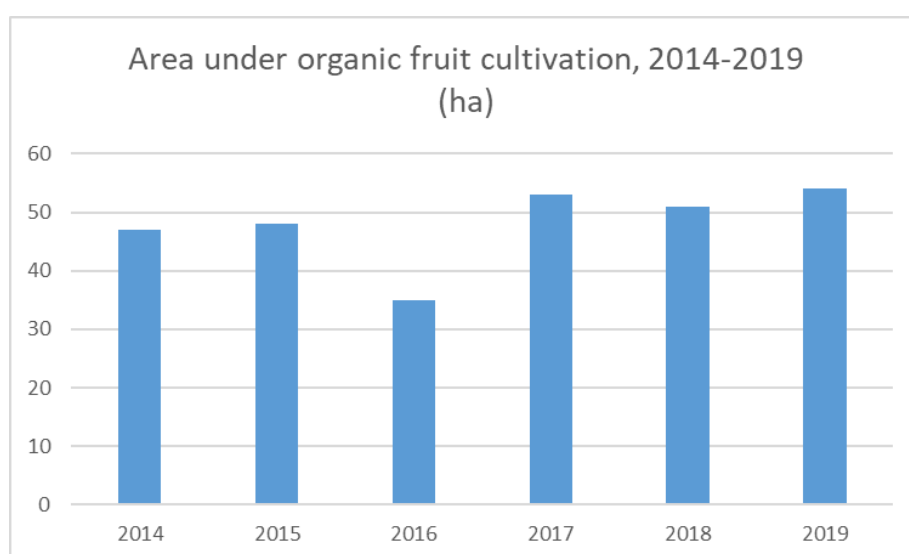
Blueberries saw a big decrease in both authorisations (-88%) and plants (-99%) whereas strawberries saw an increase particularly in plants of 537%.

The small overall size of this sector makes it almost impossible to draw any concrete conclusions from four year's data.

**Table 5: Non-organic fruit authorisations in Ireland, selected crops, 2018-2020**

Crop	2018			2019			2020		
	auths	amount		auths	amount		auths	amount	
Apple	39	2,521	plants	37	138	plants	37	379	plants
Apricot	1	1	plants	1	2	plants	1	1	plants
Blackberry	1	8	plants	2	15	plants	1	3	plants
Blackcurrant	-	-	-	3	125	plants	4	258	plants
Blueberry	3	8	plants	25	950	plants	3	7	plants
Cherry	5	10	plants	3	16	plants	4	269	plants
Fig	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	6	plants
Gooseberry	1	42	plants	6	32	plants	2	7	plants
Grape	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	10	plants
Kiwi	1	1	plants	1	2	plants	2	3	plants
Mulberry	2	3	plants	-	-	-	3	4	plants
Passion Fruit	1	0.03	kg	-	-	-	-	-	-
Peach	3	3	plants	2	2	plants	1	3	plants
Pear	6	39	plants	6	68	plants	6	18	plants
Plum/Damson/Greengage	11	67	plants	9	15	plants	9	112	plants
Quince	3	5	plants	4	4	plants	-	-	-
Raspberry	4	544	plants	8	681	plants	14	644	plants
Red Currant	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	3	plants
Strawberry	11	4,890	plants	16	3,020	plants	-	-	-
White Currant	-	-	-	2	6	plants	1	3	plants

**Graph 5: Area under organic fruit cultivation, 2014-2019<sup>7</sup>**



<sup>7</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>

## Grass, forage and fodder crops

### Grass

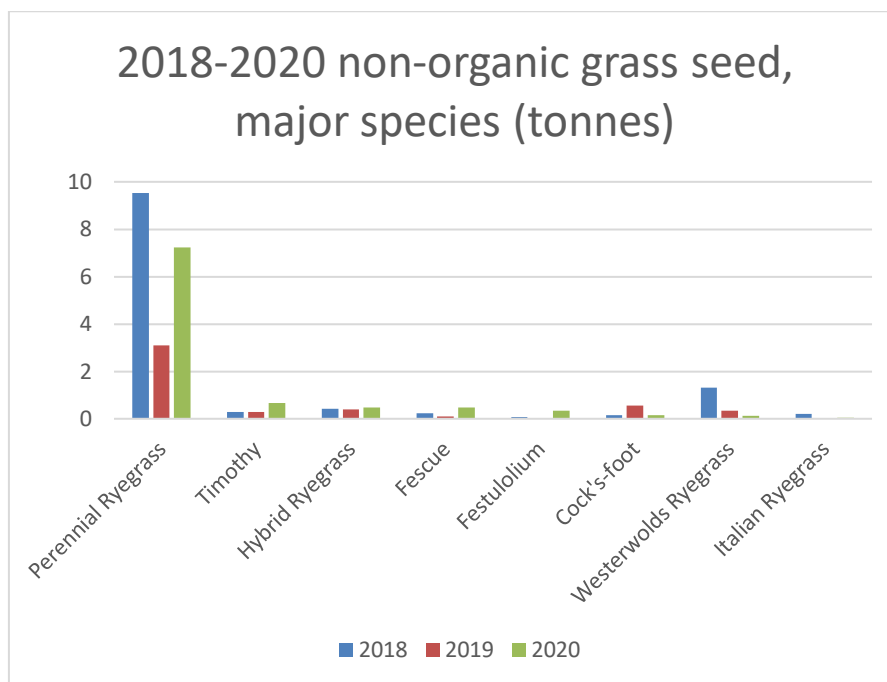
An EU derogation permitting the use of forage mixtures with a 50% organic inclusion rate without the need for derogation, down from 70% in previous years was granted for 2020 which will explain some of the increases in authorisations. Perennial ryegrass remains the only grass seed of significant volume receiving authorisation for the use of non-organic seed, and the tonnage of authorisations and the number of requests for derogations has more than doubled compared to 2019. Westerwolds, Hybrid ryegrasses, Cocksfoot, Timothy and Fescue species remain at a low level of request and so trends are difficult to ascertain. Increases in Timothy and Fescues could reflect their importance in more diverse mixes.

There appears to be little interest in authorisations for Italian ryegrass in 2019 or 2020. This may have been due to a move to hybrid ryegrasses and Festuloliums.

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

Crop	2018		2019		2020	
	auths	tonnes	auths	tonnes	auths	tonnes
Perennial Ryegrass	291	9.522	142	3.098	<b>273</b>	<b>7.229</b>
Timothy / Cats Tail	30	0.296	53	0.288	<b>73</b>	<b>0.669</b>
Hybrid Ryegrass	10	0.412	8	0.393	<b>9</b>	<b>0.465</b>
Fescue ( <i>Festuca spp.</i> )	24	0.222	28	0.111	<b>48</b>	<b>0.464</b>
Festulolium	3	0.058	10	0.002	<b>28</b>	<b>0.340</b>
Cock's-foot/Orchardgrass	30	0.140	14	0.55	<b>19</b>	<b>0.162</b>
Westerwolds Ryegrass	7	1.307	3	0.353	<b>3</b>	<b>0.136</b>
Italian Ryegrass	5	0.211	-	-	<b>3</b>	<b>0.037</b>
Tall Oatgrass	-	-	8	0.004	<b>14</b>	<b>0.009</b>
Meadow Foxtail	-	-	2	0.002	<b>1</b>	<b>0.006</b>
Colonial Bentgrass	2	0.003	-	-	<b>1</b>	<b>0.004</b>

**Graph 6: Non-organic grass seed authorisations 2018-2020 (tonnes)**



## Fodder and forage

Authorisation of fodder crops were up 50% from 2019 levels with tonnages up 25% back to 2018 levels.

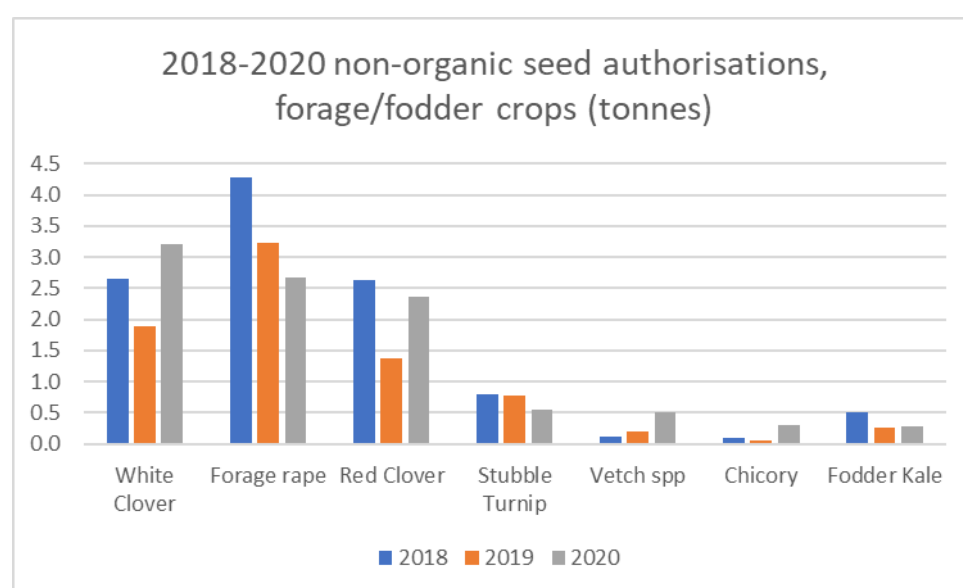
White and red clover remain the principle source of authorisations, and both are up to normal levels after falls last year. There was an increase, in both authorisations and tonnages in chicory, sainfoin, lucerne, burnet and Plantains which demonstrates an increased interest in herbal leys in livestock systems. Along with continued interest in Vetch and birds foot trefoils which have roles in weed suppression and green manures in horticultural cropping there was a strong interest in more diverse seed mixes.

There was a still high demand for fodder radish seeds after a big increase last year, reflecting the interest in arable cover crops and their ability to reduce compaction.

**Table 7: Summary of non-organic forage and fodder seeds 2018-2020**

Crop	2018		2019		2020	
	Auths	kg	Auths	kg	Auths	kg
Alfalfa (Lucerne)	11	132.6	3	6.1	6	20.2
Alsike Clover	31	146.1	27	70.5	52	154.7
Birds Foot Trefoil	9	47.3	6	4.6	20	56.0
Black Medic (Yellow trefoil)	33	72.0	20	111.3	31	103.0
Burnet	16	36.1	15	15.4	31	124.6
Chicory	18	100.5	26	60.9	70	304.1
Plantain	25	74.8	22	23.8	60	228.5
Red Clover	60	2,624.0	47	1,373.1	81	2,363.4
Sainfoin	1	12.0	7	76.8	5	194.0
Subterranean clover	-	-	1	40.0	1	1.0
Sweet Clover	-	-	-	-	19	62.8
Vetch spp	3	120.0	3	188.5	7	511.5
White Clover	304	2,645.4	235	1,887.4	307	3,217.1
Yellow Clover	-	-	-	-	-	-
Crimson Clover	5	37.3	6	153.5	3	13.5
<i>Brassica &amp; other Species:</i>						
Fodder Kale	41	506.4	21	269.8	26	270.3
Forage rape	112	4,275.4	86	3,224.2	86	2,663.1
Stubble Turnip	21	789.3	18	772.2	31	547.2
Fodder Radish	5	75.0	7	539.3	13	168.8
White Mustard	3	35.3	2	27.5	2	56.0
Fodder Beet	1	50,000 (seeds)	2	750,000 (seeds)	1	4.0

**Graph 7: 2018-2020 non-organic seed authorisations, forage/fodder top 7 crops by weight**



## **The Irish organic seed database: [ie.organicxseeds.com](http://ie.organicxseeds.com)**

This database is a requirement of EU Regulation (EC) No. 834/2007 and 889/2008 which regulates the use of seeds and seed potatoes in organic farming. The database is funded by The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and managed by the Soil Association, working in partnership with FiBL.

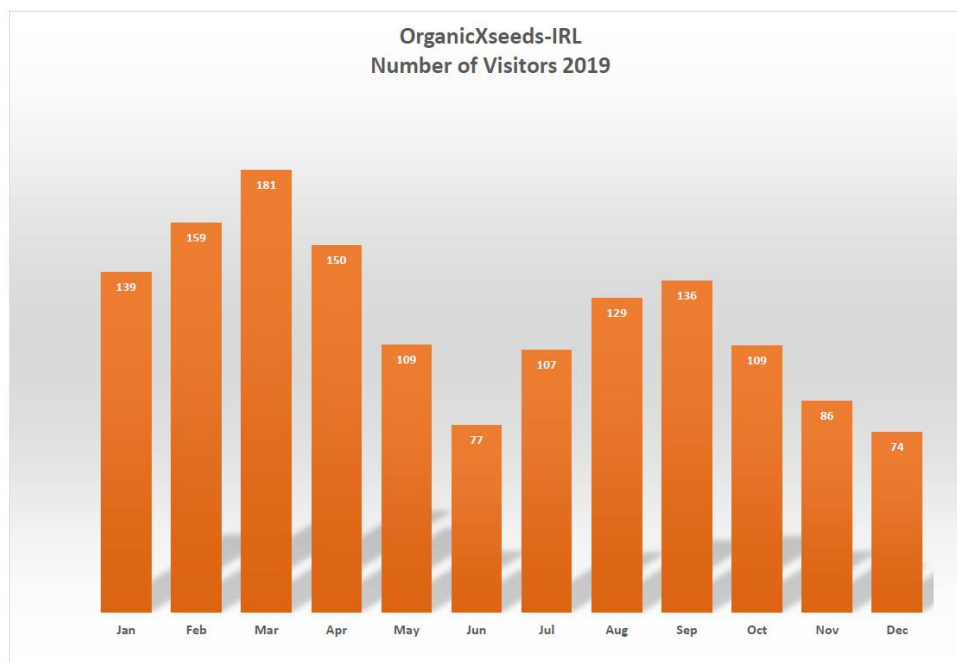
There are currently 16 seed companies registered in the database who are able to supply organic seed and/or organic seed potatoes to organic farmers and growers in the Ireland.

Seed suppliers can register species of organic seed and/or organic seed potatoes by variety via a login and password. They are required to update their seed listings in accordance with current availability.

Organic producers are legally obliged to use organic seed that is registered in the database. Registered 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:

**Graphs 8 &9: Visitors to the OrganicXseeds website from the Republic of Ireland, 2020 and 2019**





## 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 2020 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.

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