

Republic of Ireland: Annual Non-Organic Seed Authorisation Report for 2018

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 2019

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Introduction

This is the third 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

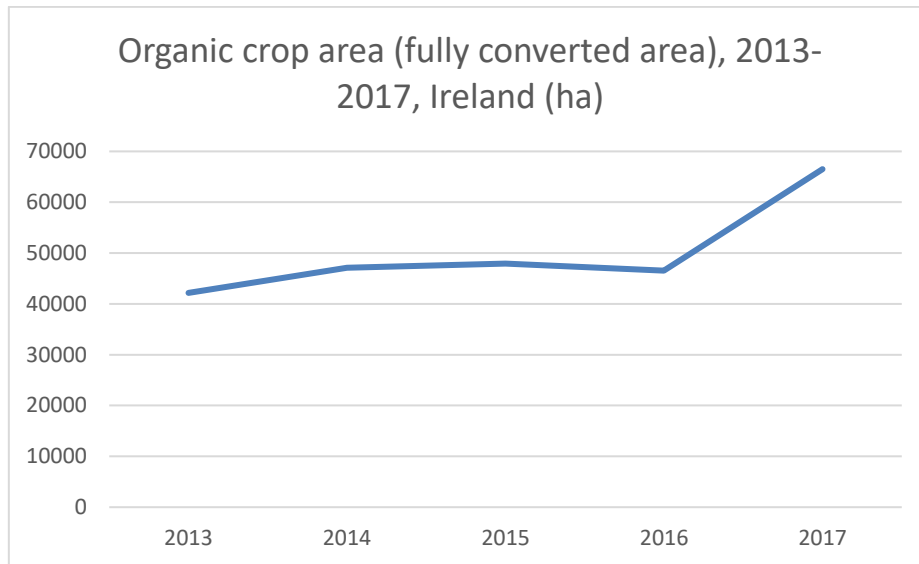
In common with many other countries across the globe, Ireland continues to experience growth in demand for organic food. The details given on the Bord Bia website¹ show an increasing trend through to 2017 (the most recent year of available data).

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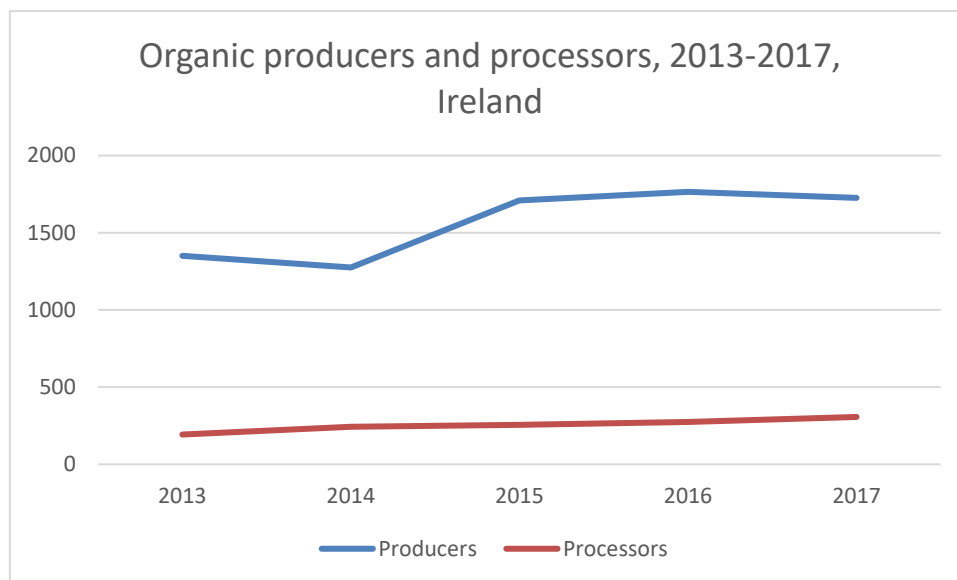
<https://www.bordbia.ie/industry/events/SpeakerPresentations/2017/OrganicMarketInformationDay/Ireland%20Organic%20Food%20and%20Drink%20Market%20Review%20-%20Iarlaith%20Corcoran,%20REDC.pdf>

Graphs 1 and 2 use data from the *Eurostat*² site. This shows increases in the numbers of organic producers and processors as well as an increasing area of organically managed land. Between 2016 and 2017 the 43% increase in organic land area is particularly notable.

Graph 1: Fully converted organic land, Ireland (ha)



Graph 2: Organic producers and processors, Ireland 2016-2018



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

Table 1: Eurostat data underlying graphs 1 & 2³

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Fully converted organic land, (ha)	42,160	47,078	47,951	46,517	66,503
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 2018 was **2,268**. This compares with 2063 (2017) and 2096 (2016) and represents an increase of 8%.

Varietal choice of seed is an ongoing concern; complying with the European Union's desire to reach a 100% organic seed approach without compromising the varietal choice available to growers 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 in 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 2018, this is down from **55** in 2017, with a total of **3.4 tonnes** which is down from **37 tonnes** used in 2017.

This significant drop in tonnage is due largely to the absence of a couple of large authorisations for Orla and Carolus from the previous year that were not given for 2018.

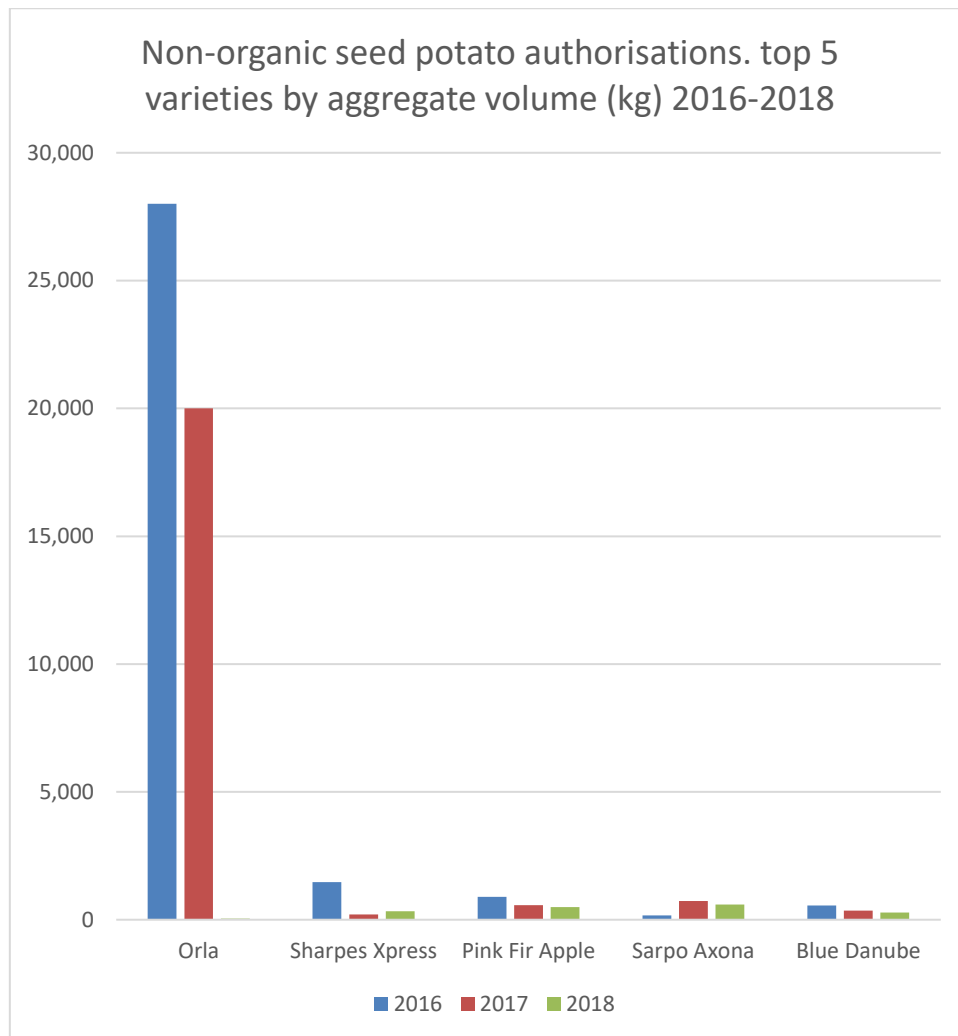
The authorisations for other varieties listed are mostly either blight resistant varieties, which have been in relatively short supply as demand for them increases, or heritage varieties which are not always easy to find as organic seed.

As noted in previous reports it is surprising to see 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 2016-2018, comparison of selected varieties

Variety	2016		2017		2018	
	auths	kg	auths	kg	auths	kg
Sarpo Axona	4	171	3	730	4	594
Belmonda	-	-	-	-	2	502
Pink Fir Apple	1	900	5	570	5	490
Salad Blue	1	150	5	430	3	375
Highland Red Burgundy	-	-	4	430	3	350
Sharpes Xpress	7	1,470	5	200	6	337
Violetta	-	-	1	50	4	293
Blue Danube	3	552	4	360	4	279
Red Emmalie	-	-	-	-	1	100
Orla	4	28,000	1	20,000	1	38
Mayan Gold	-	-	3	80	1	25
Red Duke of York	-	-	2	280	1	25

Graph 3: Top 5 varieties (by aggregate volume 2016-2018)



Arable and cereal crops

There were 301 authorisations for arable and cereal crops in 2018, an increase of 20% on 2017. Tonnage also increased by 20% to 244t.

Oats remain the most popular cereal crop, with the largest number of authorisations at 101 (up 20%), and largest tonnage at 131, up 10%.

Authorisations for wheat fell, although tonnage increased marginally, whilst figures for barley were unchanged.

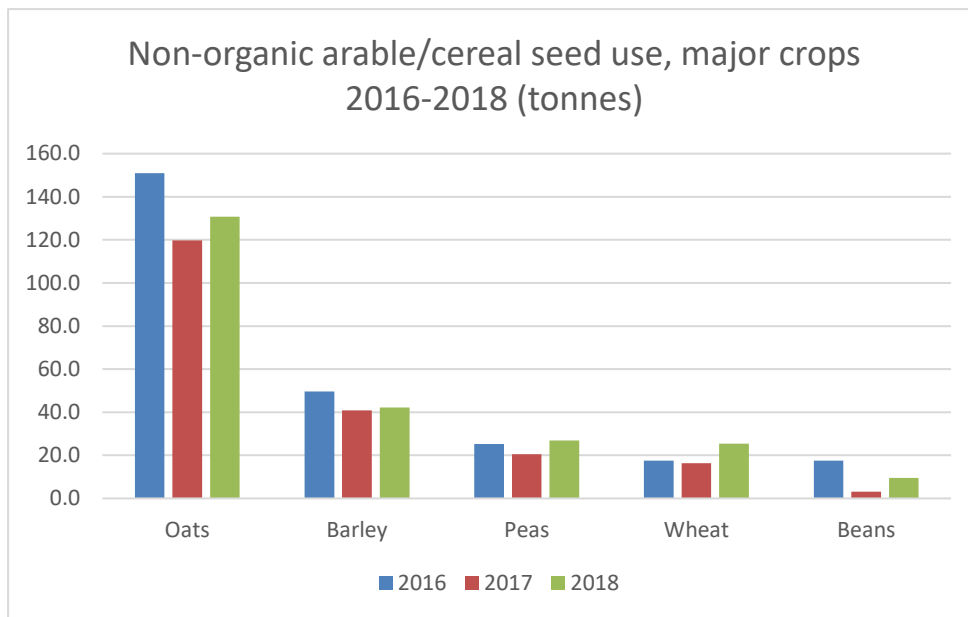
Increased plantings of rye saw 8 authorisations, for 7.2t, up from 0.15t in 2017. Although there was an increase in bean authorisations, tonnage remains well below 2016 figures, whilst peas saw an increase of 15% authorisations and 30% tonnage.

Linseed, lupins and triticale volumes of non-organic seed were low and largely unchanged.

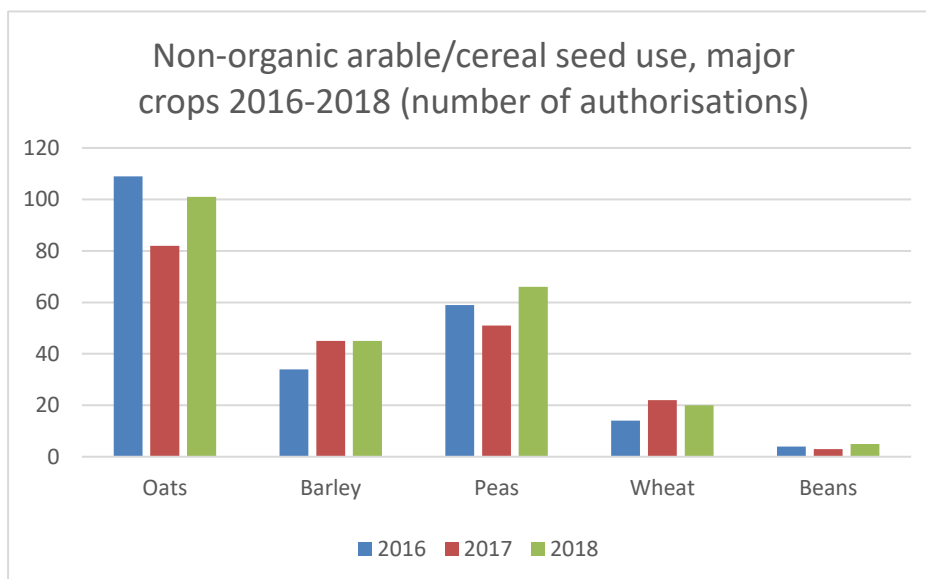
Table 4: Non-organic arable/cereal 2016-2018, comparison of selected varieties

Crop	2016		2017		2018	
	auths	tonnes	auths	tonnes	auths	tonnes
Oats	109	150.9	82	119.8	101	130.8
Barley	34	49.7	45	40.9	45	42.3
Peas	59	25.2	51	20.5	66	26.9
Wheat	14	17.6	22	16.4	20	25.5
Beans	4	17.5	3	3.2	5	9.5
Rye	4	3.1	2	0.152	8	7.5
Flax/linseed	-	-	47	1.4	48	1.2
Lupins	4	0.8	-	-	2	0.7
Triticale	3	1.2	2	0.31	6	0.4

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



Graph 5: Non-organic arable /cereal seed (authorisations) – major crops



Horticulture

The total number of authorisations issued by Irish organic control bodies during 2018 for non-organic seed in the horticultural sector was **529**. This is an increase of 45 (9%) from **484** in 2017. In terms of cropped area, 328 hectares were used for organic vegetable cultivation in 2017, a rise of 16% on the figure of 282 hectares for 2016.

Overall the number of authorisations remains high compared to the UK, with requests from Irish growers representing 17.7% of the UK total, despite the area of organic horticultural land in Ireland being only 3.4% of that in the UK. However, this year has seen a reduction in percentage comparison from 2016 (19% of authorisations from a smaller comparative land area), which is encouraging.

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:

- Kale, with an increase in both number and weight sold.
- Broccoli, there has been a 37.5% increase in total number of seeds.
- Parsnip – despite a reduction in numbers of authorisations, both number and weight of seed authorised have increased (31.5% and 60% respectively).

Those showing the largest decrease in use are:

- Tomato – despite an increase in number of authorisations, the overall number of seeds saw a 12.7% decrease.
- Carrot – there was a reduction of 42% in number of authorisations, and 5% in number (which accounts for vast majority of seed).
- Beetroot – saw a 11.5% decrease in number and 9% decrease in seed number
- Peas – a big reduction. However 2017 did see one large authorisation skew the results slightly, so this may reflect a return to expected levels.

**Table 4: Non-organic vegetable seed authorisations in Ireland, 2016-2018:
Top species by number of authorisations**

2017				Crop	2018			
auths	seeds	kg	plants		auths	seeds	kg	plants
36	5,634	0.001	1	Tomato	48	5,001	0.011	
25	119,250	0.290		Kale / Borecole	37	155,900	17.581	
25	394,475	0.030		Broccoli (sprouting broccoli)	32	631,040	0.010	
19	350,000	15.550		Asia Greens	27	501,400	22.435	
29	2,393,275	60.230		Beetroot	26	2,192,950	1.880	
37	65,280,000	0.686		Carrot	26	62,173,950	0.038	
29	19,800	2.320		Lettuce	22	56,300	0.451	
10	30,530	0.035		Cabbage, all	16	29,150	0.010	
16	981,500	0.010		Parsnip	14	1,433,700	0.025	
24	4,435	0.105		Squash / Pumpkin	14	5,020	0.030	
11	2,100	0.430		Radish	12	300	16.620	
16	306,500	12.459		Sw ede (rutabaga)	12	15,800	30.105	
13	20,000	0.003		Cauliflow er	9	10,155		
5	14,000	0.015		Celery	9	6,250		
10	42,500	37.150		Chard	9	45,200	251.301	
17	275	411.000		Pea (incl sugarsnap)	9	201	5	

Fruit

During 2018 the total number of authorisations for non-organic fruit seed and plant propagating material was **92**, a drop of 35% from the 2017 total of 142. In 2017 a total of 53 ha was recorded as being used for organic fruit production, an increase of 56% over the 2016 area of 34 ha⁴.

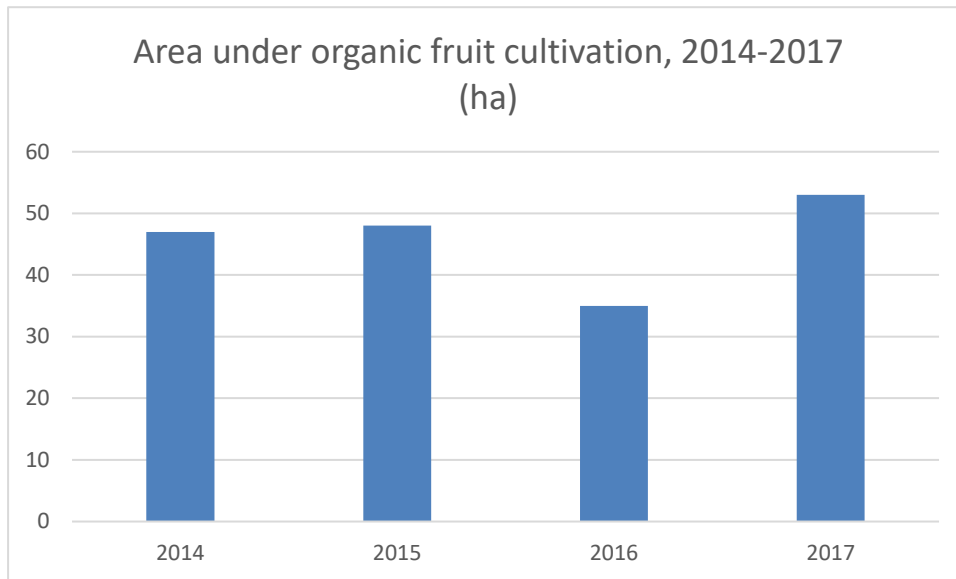
The small overall size of this sector makes it almost impossible to draw any concrete conclusions from three year's data. There continue to be significant plantings of apples, with some strawberries and raspberries also. The only organic top fruit plant suppliers in the UK do not deliver to Ireland, which would make it harder to obtain organic stock. It is likely therefore that the authorisations represent the bulk of new organic plantings in Ireland. As discussed in previous reports there could be an opportunity for Irish fruit suppliers to offer organic plants for sale in Ireland.

Table 5: Summary of non-organic fruit authorisations in Ireland

Crop	2016			2017			2018		
	auths	amount		auths	amount		auths	kg	
Apple	85	3,838	plants	61	2,552	plants	39	2,521	plants
Apricot	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	plants
Blackberry	1	28	plants	-	-	-	1	8	plants
Blackcurrant	1	200	plants	3	35	plants	-	-	-
Blueberry	21	4,836	plants	19	3,080	plants	3	8	plants
Cherry	3	11	plants	-	-	-	5	10	plants
Fig	-	-	-	1	2	plants	-	-	-
Gooseberry	1	1	plants	4	145	plants	1	42	plants
Grape	2	2	plants	-	-	-	-	-	-
Kiwi	1	1	plant	-	-	-	1	1	plants
Mulberry	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	3	plants
Passion Fruit	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	0	kg
Peach	-	-	-	1	2	plants	3	3	plants
Pear	19	66	plants	4	4	plants	6	39	plants
Plum, Damson, Greengage	12	54	plants	7	106	plants	11	67	plants
Quince	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	5	plants
Raspberry	11	517	plants	12	455	plants	4	544	plants
Red Currant	1	1	plant	5	70	plants	-	-	-
Strawberry	21	4,745	plants	23	3,030	plants	11	4,890	plants
White Currant	1	1	plant	3	50	plants	-	-	-

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

Graph 6 Area under organic fruit cultivation, 2014-2017



Grass, forage and fodder crops

Grass

There was an overall increase in the number of authorisations of 10% compared to 2017, but with a 4% drop in seed volume to 11.95t.

Ryegrass continues to dominate, with a fall in Perennial Ryegrass of 1.6t% being offset by a 1.1t increase in Westerworld's. Italian ryegrass saw a fourfold volume increase to 0.3t, from 5 authorisations. It is difficult to draw conclusions from these, as the authorisation base is so small. Otherwise, there was stability in the categories of Timothy, Cocksfoot, and Orchard Grass. Festulolium shows a 60% decrease, but from a small base, so again little can be read into that.

Graph 7: Non-organic grass seed authorisations 2018 (tonnes)

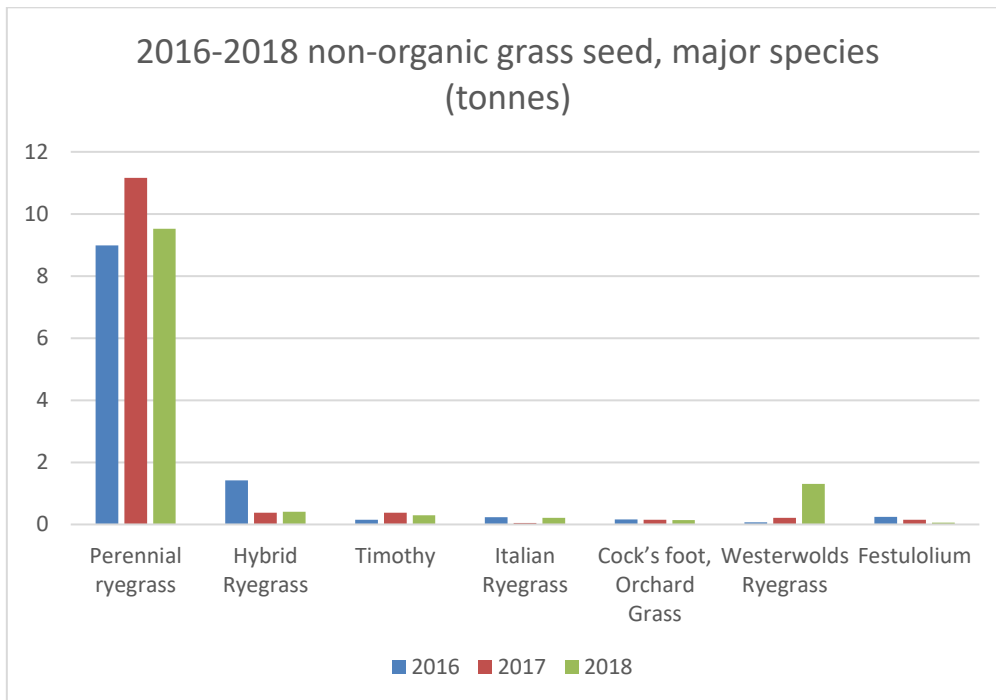


Table 6: Summary of non-organic grass seed authorisations in Ireland

Crop	2017		2018	
	auths	tonnes	auths	tonnes
Perennial Ryegrass	298	11.158	291	9.522
Westerwolds Ryegrass	2	0.215	7	1.307
Hybrid Ryegrass	10	0.376	10	0.412
Timothy / Cats Tail	23	0.378	30	0.296
Fescue (<i>Festuca spp.</i>)	10	0.079	24	0.222
Ryegrass > Italian Ryegrass	2	0.051	5	0.211
Cock's-foot, Orchardgrass	31	0.151	30	0.140
Festulolium	6	0.155	3	0.058
Colonial Bentgrass	1	0.001	2	0.003

Fodder and forage

The greatest number of authorisations were for white clover (304), although the volume of seed (2.65t) was comparable to that supplied under authorisation of red clover (at 2.62t), but with only 60 authorisations. Although this represented a 15% decline in authorisations for red clover, there was a volume increase of 30%.

The biggest single volume of seed supplied under authorisation, was for forage rape at 4.28t. This represents a near doubling of the 2017 total. Other catch crops saw large increases in volume, albeit from much smaller base figures: Alfalfa (x8), Alsike (x3), Black Medic (x7), Stubble Turnip (> x2). This was most likely down to farmers needing to get extra fodder for their livestock after a summer of drought, so it is unsurprising that there was insufficient organic seed in these categories to meet this sudden increase in demand. Exceptions to this were for Bird's Foot Trefoil, Sainfoin, and White Mustard, which all saw significant falls in volume supplied under authorisation.

Graph 8: Authorisations issued for non-organic forage / fodder seed (major crops) in 2016

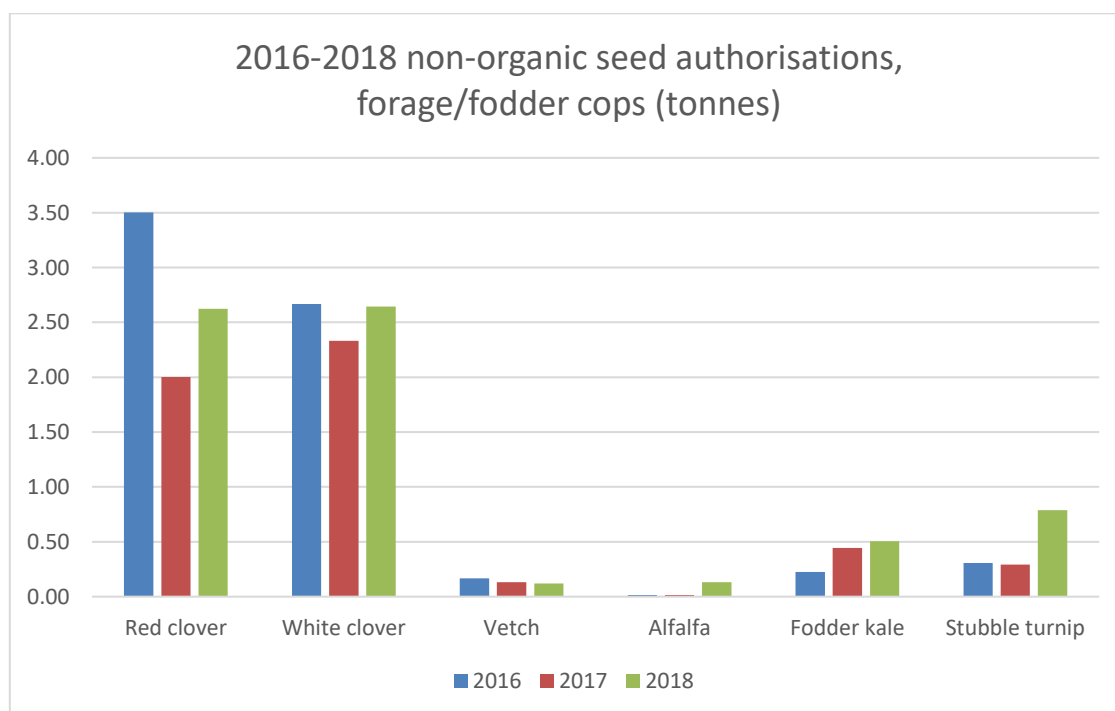


Table 7 Summary of non-organic forage and fodder seeds 2017-2018

Crop		2017		2018	
		Auths	kg	Auths	kg
Alfalfa (Lucerne)	<i>Medicago Sativa</i>	11	15.4	11	132.6
Alsike Clover	<i>Trifolium hybridum</i>	23	47.0	31	146.1
Birds Foot Trefoil	<i>Lotus Corniculatus</i>	14	104.0	9	47.3
Black Medic	<i>Medicago Lupulina</i>	8	9.6	33	72.0
Burnet	<i>Sanguisorba spp.</i>	12	40.0	16	36.1
Chicory	<i>Chichorium Intybus</i>	28	83.0	18	100.5
Plantain	<i>Plantago spp.</i>	22	44.0	25	74.8
Red Clover	<i>T. Pratense</i>	72	2,001.0	60	2,624.0
Sainfoin	<i>Onobrychis</i>	3	98.0	1	12.0
Subterranean clover	<i>T. Subterranean</i>	1	10.0	-	-
Sweet Clover	<i>Melilotus Albus</i>	1	7.5	-	-
Vetch spp	<i>Vicia</i>	3	132.0	3	120.0
White Clover	<i>Trifolium Repens</i>	267	2,331.0	304	2,645.4
Yellow Clover	<i>M. Officianalis</i>	12	18.0	-	-
<i>Brassica Species:</i>					
Fodder Kale	<i>B. Oleracea sabellica</i>	43	443.0	41	506.4
Forage rape	<i>B. Napus</i>	66	2,289.0	112	4,275.4
Stubble Turnip	<i>B. rapa</i>	17	291.0	21	789.3
White Mustard	<i>Sinapsis Alba</i>	7	288.0	3	35.3

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). In 2017 there were only 3 authorisations granted for 5 trees and 2018 saw a single authorisation for 3 trees.

Table 8 Tree authorisations 2016-2018

2016	Auths	Number of plants	2017	Auths	Number of plants	2018	Auths	Number of plants
Alder	2	550	Crab Apple	2	2	Hazel	1	3
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 continued in 2018 with a session in November. This meeting 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, to assess the current volume and diversity of organic seed available to Irish farmers and growers, and to review use of the OrganicX website. The morning session of the meeting dealt with general matters, the afternoon split into separate meeting for potatoes/horticulture and arable/grass.

The Irish organic seed database: ie.organicxseeds.com

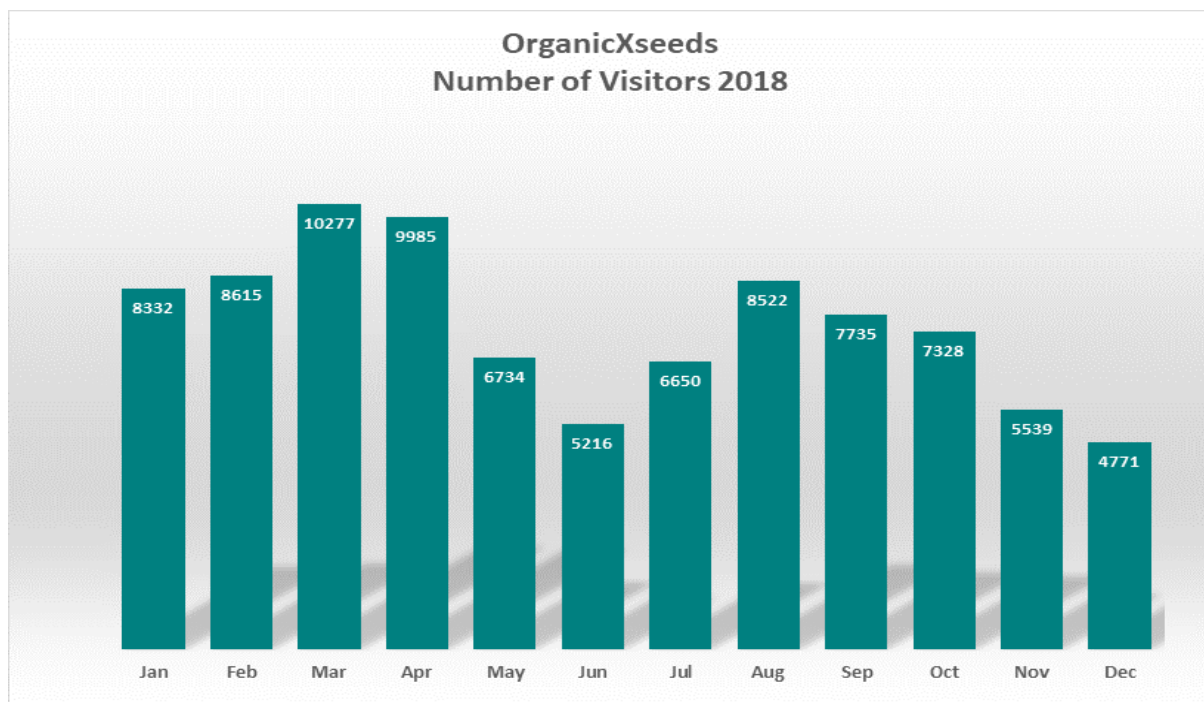
The database is a requirement of EU Regulation (EC) No. 1452/2003 which regulates the use of seeds and seed potatoes in organic farming.

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:



Percentage visitors OrganicXseeds in different countries

Germany	67.1%
Belgium	7.3%
United Kingdom	6.0%
Switzerland	4.7%
Sweden	3.6%
Ireland	1.6%
Luxembourg	0.3%
Others	9.5%

During 2018 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 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, Adrian Steele

Data compiled by Martin Parkinson. Seed working groups chaired by Liz Bowles and Ben Raskin.