

Alfalfa seed production for domestic and for export in Egypt

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The importance of alfalfa as forage crop has been increased after the expansion in cultivation of the reclaimed desert in Egypt. Improving seed supply leads to improved feed and food supply. Nevertheless, no major effort is made to provide local and export markets with seeds of correctly identified and pure cultivars of alfalfa in spite of the existence of all the essential factors for a successful seed industry. Alfalfa seed production is conducted mainly by the farming sector and has largely been neglected by the public sector. Farmers have traditionally produced their own seed or purchased their requirements from local markets. On the other hand, a wide genetic base of indigenous alfalfa populations, proper irrigation, a harvest and seed period free from rain, sunshine and clear sky all year and highly fertile soils in isolated areas are available. Five alfalfa composite varieties have been developed through selection among local ecotypes and yielded about 25% more than introduced cultivars in herbage yield due to the adaptability to most existing adverse conditions. Moreover, uncertified, uncontrolled and unidentified local alfalfa seed are highly demanded by foreign markets due to its unique productivity and high tolerance to adverse conditions. Egypt is producing about 400 tons alfalfa seed yearly and about 90% of this quantity is exported to the gulf countries due to its high forage performance in these countries. However, seed production technology is not well understood by most alfalfa growers. Alfalfa seeds are produced from small patches from areas grown mainly for forage production purposes. Seed productivity is considered relatively low (averaged about 150 kg/ha) in comparison with world's records. This may be due to the lack of infrastructure such as cleaning facilities, specific insecticides, lack of proper pollinators and many other components that are not available at competitive prices to growers. The challenge of producing a high alfalfa seed at a reasonable cost includes the mastering of all known principles and putting them in practice under environmental and field conditions and has not been achieved yet.

References

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