

# UK Annual Non-Organic Seed Authorisation Report for 2015

UK 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 Defra  
March 2016

## Contents

<u>Purpose of the report</u>	Page 3
<u>Context</u>	Page 3
<u>Summary of authorisations</u>	Page 3
<u>Seed potatoes</u>	Page 4
<u>Arable &amp; cereal crops</u>	Page 7
<u>Horticulture</u>	Page 10
<u>Fruit</u>	Page 12
<u>Grass seed</u>	Page 14
<u>Forage &amp; fodder crops</u>	Page 16
<u>Organic seed working groups</u>	Page 17
<u>Seed for seed production</u>	Page 18
<u>The UK database: Organic X Seeds</u>	Page 19
<u>Explanation of authorisation data</u>	Page 20
<u>Seed authorisation data</u>	Page 22
<u>Acknowledgements</u>	Page 22

## Purpose of the report

The UK non-organic annual seed authorisation report provides information on the quantities and varieties of non-organic seed used by organic farmers and growers. 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 the UK, the report is compiled by the Soil Association on behalf of Defra. It is then sent to the European Commission and other member states, and also made publicly available via the [Organic X Seeds](#) website.

## Context

Sales of organic products in the United Kingdom increased by 4.9 % in 2015<sup>1</sup>, with box schemes, catering, and independent / online retail channels seeing significantly higher rises in sales than the overall percentage quoted above. This marks the third year of consecutive growth, and the organic market in the United Kingdom is now worth almost £2 billion – its highest level since the peaks of 2007 and 2008.

According to the most recent statistics released by Defra, the total area of organic and in-conversion land in the UK decreased by 4.6% between 2013 and 2014, and numbers of organic producers and processors fell by 1.2%<sup>2</sup>. Anecdotal evidence is that larger growers are confident in the market and starting to increase their organic land area for 2016. In the meantime, we are likely to see an undersupply in UK organic produce, with shortfalls being increasingly met by imports.

## Summary of authorisations

The total number of non-organic seed authorisations issued to organic farmers in the United Kingdom decreased from **13,899** in 2014 to **13,484** in 2015 – a fall of 3%.

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 tiered seed costs for farmers and undermining public trust, despite the practical reasons that may be behind such an increase. Continued progress in organic seed production and

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Soil Association Organic Market Report 2016 - <http://www.soilassociation.org/marketreport>

<sup>2</sup> Source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/organic-farming-statistics-2014>

usage is important to allow the organic sector to comply with regulatory requirements, protect public integrity and trust in organic food, and focus organic seed innovation. The current ongoing review of the regulation is trying to address this issue.

The authorisation report is analysed in six main sectors: Seed Potatoes, Arable/Cereal crops, Horticulture, Fruit, Grass, and Forage/Fodder crops.

## Seed Potatoes

**101** authorisations were issued in 2015, compared with 94 in 2014. 1313 tonnes of non-organic seed were used - an increase of 568 tonnes (76%) on the 745 tonnes recorded in 2014. We are not able to relate this to any increase or decrease in land area until the 2015 land area statistics<sup>3</sup> are made available.

The bulk of authorisations would appear to be for growers supplying into the supermarket sector, where specific varieties are often contractually stipulated. Lady Balfour recorded the most significant individual variety increase, rising by 146 tonnes compared to 2014. As has been discussed in previous reports, the high levels of authorisations for Lady Balfour are reported to be due to the difficulty in predicting demand, and because it is often a named variety when packed there is thus no opportunity for the processor to substitute a similar variety. However, since this is one of the flagship organic varieties, it would be helpful if more organic seed were produced. It is clear from the low levels of authorisation requests for 'seed for seed' production of Lady Balfour (only 350kg in 2015) that there is little commitment from the market to improve the availability of organic seed for this variety.

With regard to overall authorisations, 2015 presented a mixed picture:

- Three varieties showed a marked decrease: Vales Emerald, which reduced more than 50% to 40 tonnes; Lady Christi, which after a large increase in 2014 fell by 75% to 13.75 tonnes; and Harlequin, which saw a decline of 56% in volume.
- There were high levels of requests for Jester, Corolle, Remarka, and Bambino – varieties that have not featured in recent years.
- Alexia is another variety which saw a large rise, from 103.75 tonnes in 2014 to 160 tonnes in 2015 – making it the variety with second highest volume of authorisations.
- After a large drop in 2014, Charlotte increased from 78 tonnes to 106 tonnes – a similar level of authorisations as was recorded in 2013 for this variety.
- Jersey Royal increased slightly after a drop in 2014.

Overall the levels of authorisations in the potato sector continue to give serious concern. Particularly given the relative proportion of land needed to produce seed for this crop.

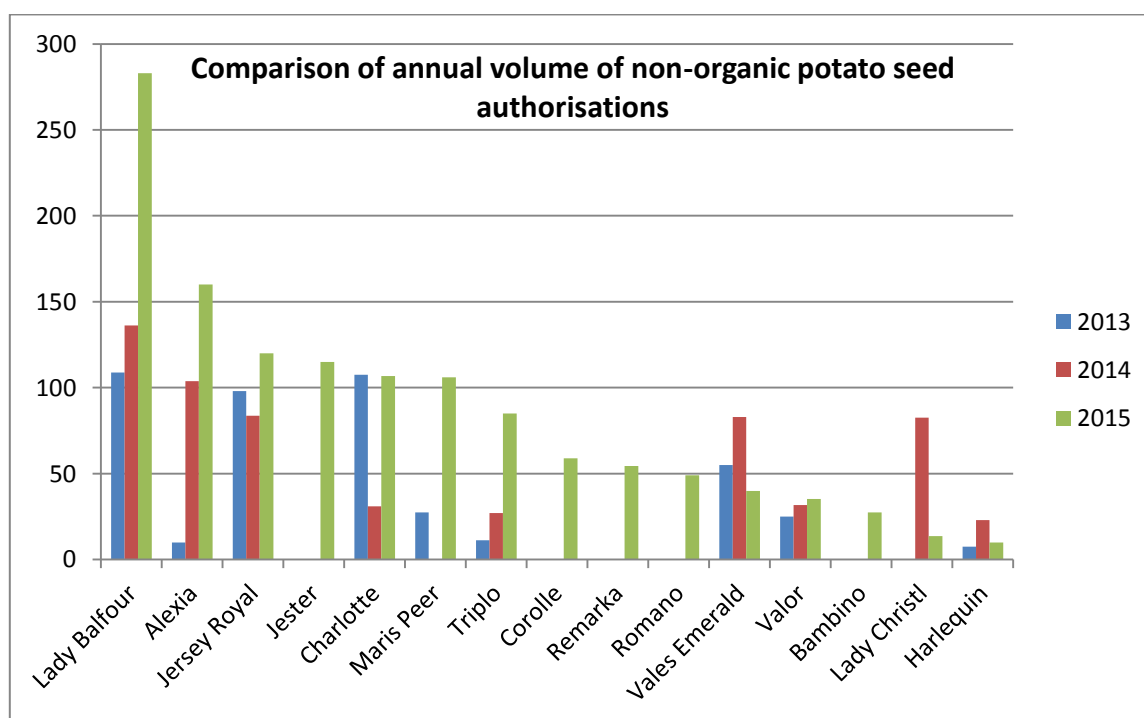
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<sup>3</sup> Potatoes don't have an individual listing in the statistics – they are included in the 'vegetables' category.

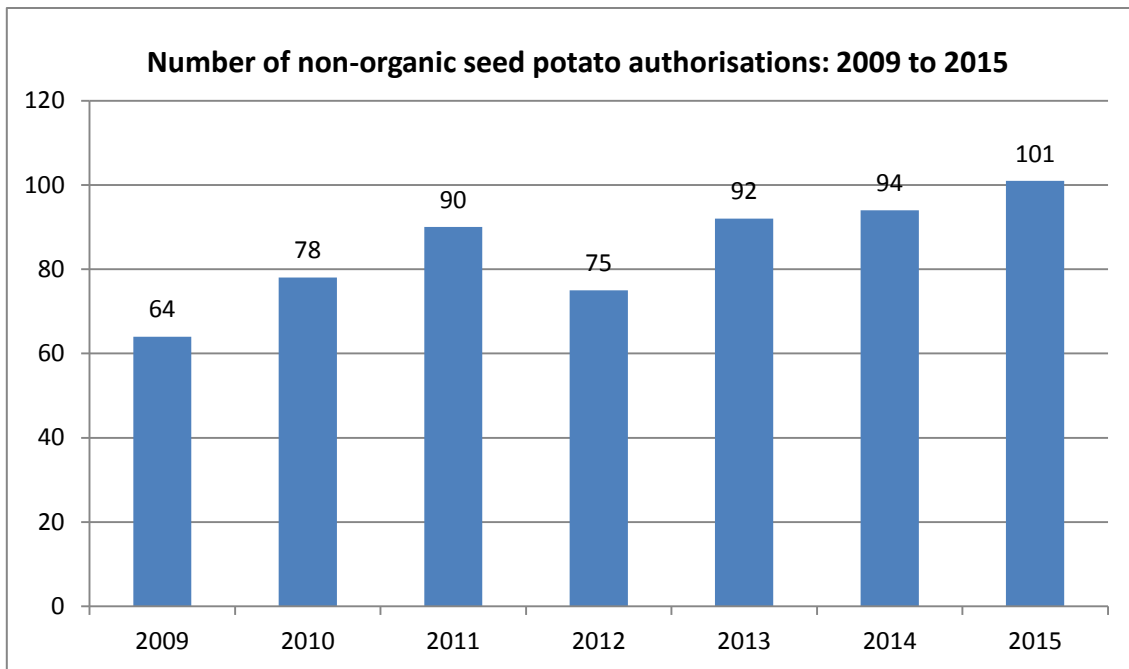
**Table 1: Non-organic seed potato authorisations issued to UK organic farmers in 2015:  
Top 15 varieties by volume**

Variety	No. of authorisations	Quantity	Unit	Change 2014 - 2015
Lady Balfour	7	283.00	tonnes	↑146.3
Alexia	3	160.00	tonnes	↑56.3
Jersey Royal	3	120.00	tonnes	↑34.3
Jester	2	115.00	tonnes	new
Charlotte	8	106.74	tonnes	↑75.8
Maris Peer	2	106.00	tonnes	n/a
Triplo	1	85.00	tonnes	↑58.0
Corolle	2	59.00	tonnes	new
Remarka	2	54.50	tonnes	new
Romano	3	49.00	tonnes	n/a
Vales Emerald	1	40.00	tonnes	↓43.0
Valor	9	35.26	tonnes	↑3.5
Bambino	1	27.50	tonnes	new
Lady Christl	1	13.75	tonnes	↓42.5
Harlequin	2	10.00	tonnes	↓13.0

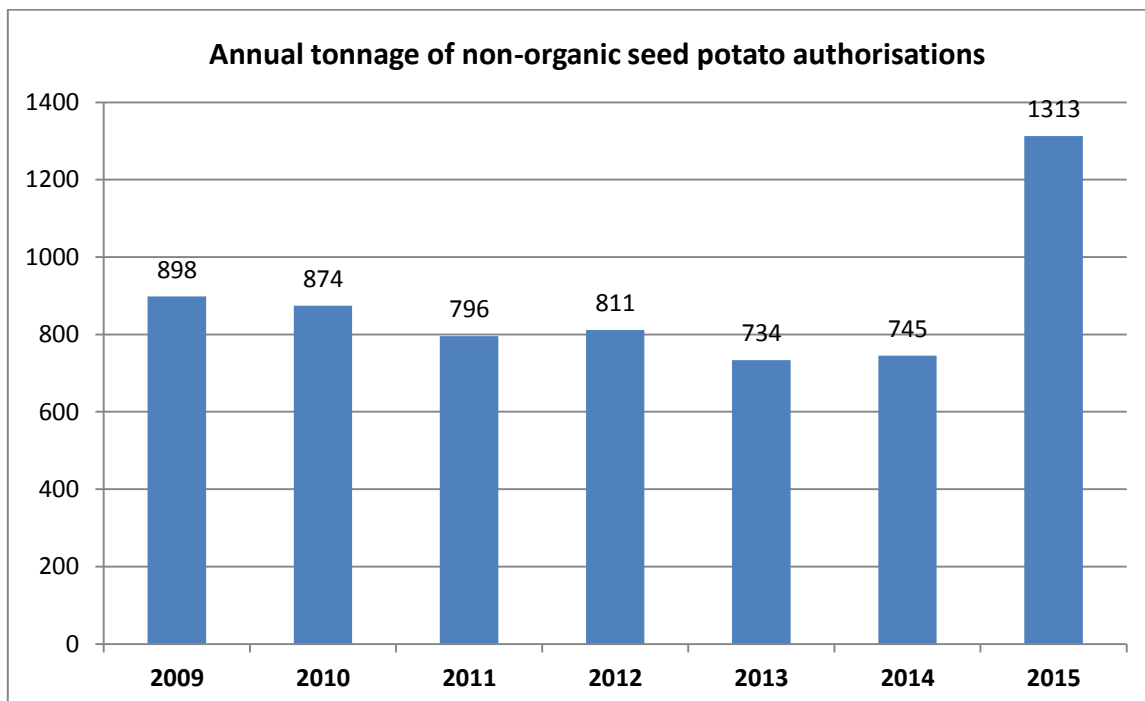
**Graph 1: Top 15 varieties of non-organic potato seed used in 2015, compared with the previous two years**



**Graph 2: Number of non-organic seed potato authorisations issued in the UK: 2009-2015**



**Graph 3: Total volume of non-organic seed potato seed authorisations: 2009-2015**



## Arable and cereal crops

2015 saw an increase in the number of non-organic arable and cereal seed authorisations for the first time since 2009, rising to **599** in total. Though this figure is only 8.9% higher than was recorded in 2014, this is against the trend of a 3.5% reduction over the previous year in the area of organic cereals in the UK - leaving it at only 70% of the peak reached in 2009 (60,000 Ha). The tonnage of non-organic seed authorisations also increased, rising to 568 tonnes in 2015 (+ 9.8%). The major causes for the higher use of non-organic seeds appears to be a large increase in the volume of authorisations for winter wheat and spring oats, although winter triticale authorisations were down sharply by comparison to 2014. Winter wheat authorisations made up more than 25% of the total tonnage of authorisations given for all cereals. This could be due to many of the businesses selling organic cereal seeds moving away from producing winter varieties due to past lack of demand. The swings may also be weather related, with severe problems in 2012 leading to reduced organic seed supply for 2013. 2013 saw better weather conditions, thereby improving organic seed supply for 2014 plantings. However during 2014, all seed houses reported good stocks of organic seed availability, hence the reasons for the increase in authorisations to use non-organic seed would appear to be unrelated to supply, and might include:

- A swing to growing winter wheat with a lack of availability of organic seed to meet the increased demand.
- Arable seed companies have expressed concerns that some authorisations to use non-organic seed may be being granted unnecessarily. The current EU organic regulation enables growers to seek authorisations on the basis that the varieties available as organic seed are not “suitable” for their production systems. It has therefore proved very difficult for organic control bodies to successfully argue individual authorisation requests due to the use of such a broad term.

With regard to leguminous crops, the number of authorisations has remained relatively stable in recent years, but reduced by 19% in 2015 compared to the previous year’s data. Authorisations for field beans continue at a very low level, although in 2015 the total volume was 125% higher than in 2014. The tonnage of field pea authorisations increased by 12.5% compared the previous year. It is likely that the increase in field pea authorisations will be linked to field peas being included in forage mixes, where a 70% by weight requirement for organic seeds is in place in the UK.

The 2014 data produced by Defra saw another dip in the amount of land managed organically in the United Kingdom, dropping by 4% across all sectors. This translated into a 3.5% drop in the area of organic and in conversion land in cereals and other arable crops in 2014. The impact of the new Countryside Stewardship Scheme has not led to any major change in the prevalence of organic arable farming. However it is difficult to be able to provide accurate analysis when the data available is at least 12 months out of date. Clear, concise, up to date data would allow us to:

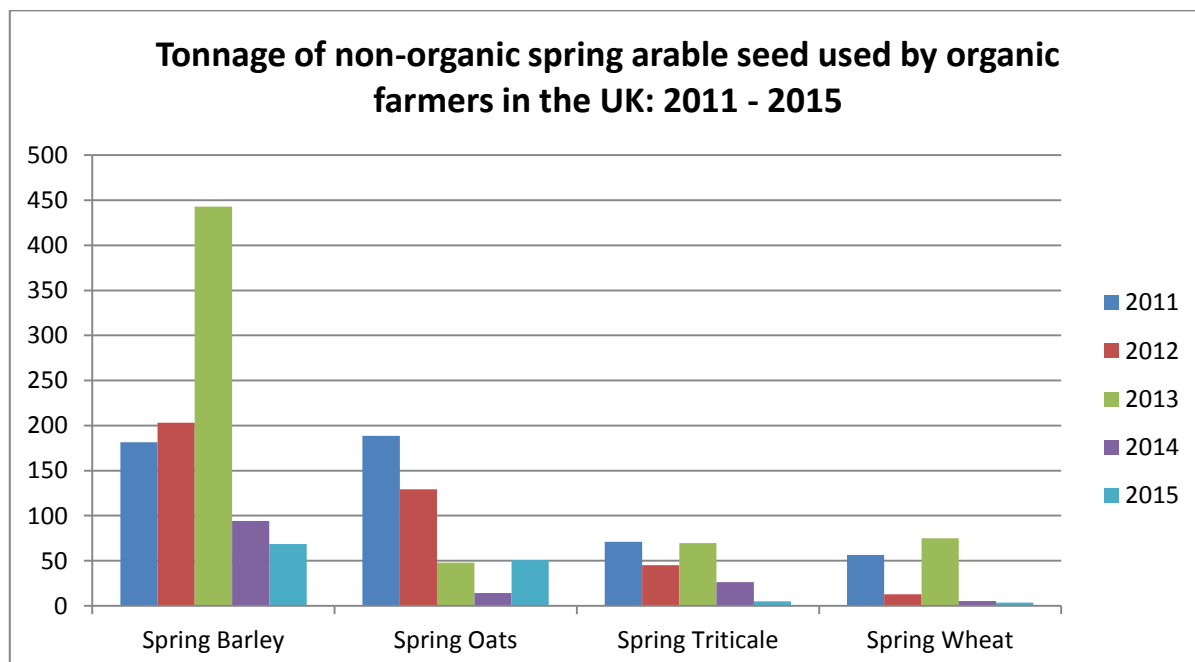
- Match up-to-date land area plantings to the number of authorisations issued in that period in real time, to ensure that breeders and seed suppliers can be much more responsive to producers’ needs.

- Improve the role of the seed working groups, which enhance communication between Defra, the control bodies, seed companies and producers. This encourages all those concerned to work towards shared objectives.
- Allow seed producers to respond to producer needs in terms of volume and varietal choice.

**Table 2: Non-organic arable seed used by organic farmers: 2013 to 2015**

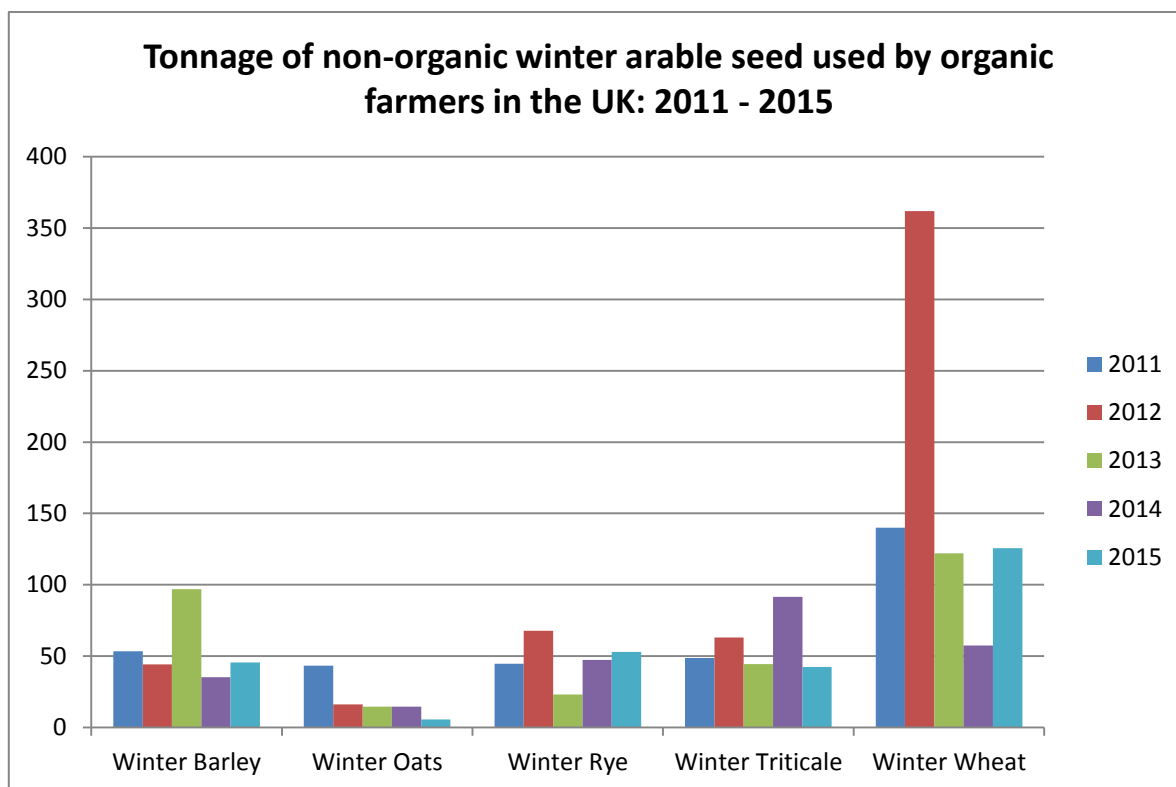
Crop	2013 Data		2014 Data		2015 Data		Change 2014-15	
	Auths	Tonnes	Auths	Tonnes	Auths	Tonnes	Auths	Tonnes
Spring Barley	103	443.1	83	94	69	68.6	↓24	↓25.4
Spring Oats	25	48	43	14.3	50	50.7	↑7	↑36.4
Spring Triticale	73	69.5	26	26.3	8	5	↓18	↓21.3
Spring Wheat	25	74.9	26	5.5	56	3.6	↑30	↓1.9
Winter Barley	40	97	13	35.3	19	45.5	↑6	↑10.2
Winter Oats	7	14.5	11	14.5	7	5.5	↓4	↓9
Winter Rye	14	23.1	18	47.4	44	53	↑12	↑5.6
Winter Triticale	17	44.5	23	91.6	8	42.5	↓15	↓49.1
Winter Wheat	54	122	39	57.5	39	125.6	0	↑68.1
Spelt	11	50.8	7	19.5	7	28	0	↑8.5
Field Bean	14	45.7	11	7.4	6	16.7	↓5	↑9.3
Field Pea	150	102.9	133	95	116	106.9	↓17	↑11.9

**Graph 4: Comparison of non-organic spring arable seed authorisations**

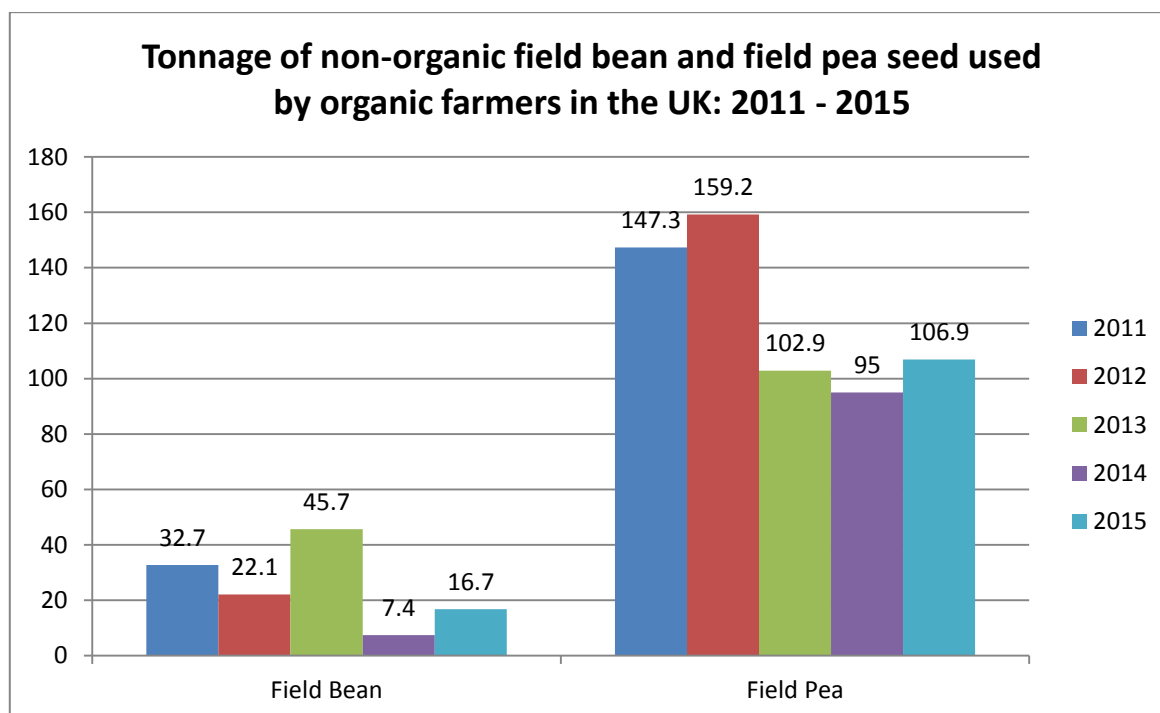




**Graph 5: Comparison of non-organic winter arable seed authorisations**



**Graph 6: Comparison of non-organic field bean/pea seed authorisations**



## Horticulture

The total number of authorisations for non-organic seed in the horticultural sector declined from **3546** in 2014 to 3386 in 2015 (4.5%). Due to the time lag in the release of land statistics, it is not possible to directly relate this to overall organic horticultural production.

Against a backdrop of the continued growth in sales of organic produce, this reduction is encouraging, although the area of certified organic land is not yet increasing so it is still possible that this represents an increase in real terms.

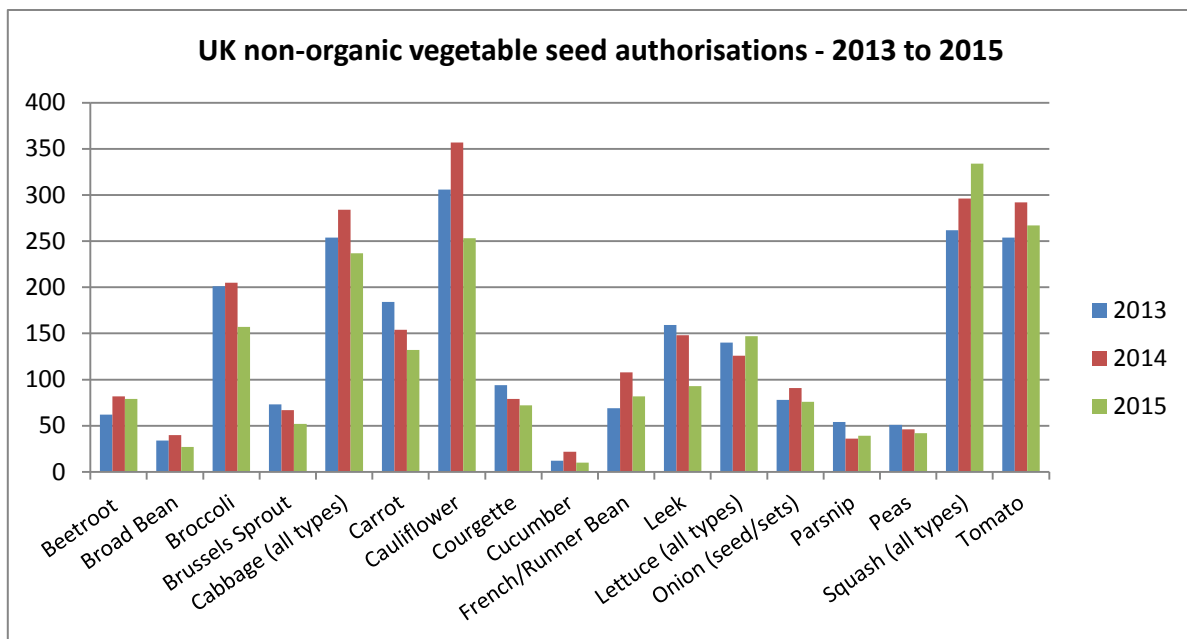
It remains almost impossible to show a simple comparison and analysis of authorisations for the horticultural sector, due to the huge range of crops and varieties which are sold and recorded using different units of measurement (by weight, number of seeds etc). However, seed numbers have been quoted in some significant instances in the accompanying text. Table 3 and Graph 7 below show comparisons for some of the major vegetable crops.

**Table 3: Summary data for the top 20 horticultural crop species in 2015 (by number of non-organic seed authorisations) - compared with the same crops in 2014**

2014 - 3546 Authorisations				Crop Species	2015 - 3386 Authorisations			
No. of Auths	Volume Denomination				No. of Auths	Volume Denomination		
	Seeds	Plants	Kg			Seeds	Plants <sup>4</sup>	Kg
267	799,452		3.300	Squash, pumpkin	307	629,956		1.372
292	175,578		0.256	Tomato	267	342,292	93	0.357
357	8,446,322	249,000	0.030	Cauliflower	253	5,022,916		0.850
205	19,494,652	235,000	0.112	Broccoli	157	13,349,027		1.127
144	2,749,954		405.743	Kale	150	5,828,600	1,010	17.136
154	1,008,096,889		0.251	Carrot	132	1,051,107,249	100	10.160
116	24,940,973		3,744.620	Sweetcorn	118	56,486,920		1,500.500
69	3,890		530.042	Quinoa	102	2,000		1,600.992
78	888,518,510		2.300	Spinach	94	719,879,525		1.650
148	19,797,870	170,000	0.020	Leek	93	11,749,620		1.000
107	2,911,350			Cabbage: Savoy	83	2,589,024		0.050
82	70,464,586		16.280	Beetroot	79	98,907,003		18.650
92	4,533,834		5.395	Cabbage: white/green	76	3,597,881	100	2.403
43	5,917	50	0.0012	Chillies	76	5,254		0.022
79	471,364		82.555	Courgette	72	420,481		180.110
45	15,235,111		1.140	Lettuce: head lettuce	68	12,635,115		0.579
59	27,694,252		0.318	Onion: seed	54	28,912,400		0.945
67	436,410			Brussels Sprouts	52	409,407		0.151
55	21,420,951		38.260	Pak Choi	44	20,268,994		25.681
24	73,825		0.005	Sweet Pepper	42	159,382		0.215

<sup>4</sup> Producers applying for seed authorisations occasionally enter a figure for the intended number of plants.

**Graph 7: Non-organic vegetable seed authorisations comparison (selected crops)**



The continued high levels of authorisations reflect the tough economic climate for vegetable growers. There continues to be consolidation amongst producers and amalgamation of organic holdings, and it is possible that this has resulted in a reduction in the number of authorisations without a similar reduction in total seed number or weight. A more detailed analysis based upon more robust data may well indicate a reduction or increase in the volumes used - even though individual authorisations have remained fairly stable. For many crops that have shown a change in the number of authorisations you can see an increase/decrease in quantity by either weight or number. Calculating exact trends is therefore very tricky.

Amongst the major crops some of the notable movers are:

- Carrot – there was another reduction (14%) in the number of authorisations for this crop from 154 to 132, but a 4% increase in seed sold by the thousand (the majority).
- Cauliflower – a significant decrease in both the number of authorisations and overall seed number. This may well reflect a smaller acreage being grown rather than greater availability of organic seed.
- Kale – authorisations for this crop have increased by more than 50% in number of seeds (though the number of authorisations remained stable), reflecting the huge increase in demand for kale in almost all markets.
- Cucumber – although there was a 44% decrease in the number of authorisations, there was also a similar number of new authorisations for rootstocks. It is not clear whether this is being grafted onto organic varieties.
- Onion – although authorisations for seed remained stable, there was a 290% increase in the number of authorisations for sets sold by the thousand, and a 160% increase of sets sold by weight - despite reductions in the number of authorisations for both.

- Tomato – there was a decrease in the number of authorisations (8%), but the detail shows a huge increase in the number of seeds (95%).
- Lettuce – this crop continues to do well, with a reduction over the three main categories of 35%. This reflects the good range of organic varieties available.
- Sweetcorn – there was a 124% increase in the number of seeds compared to 2014.
- Parsnip – despite a small increase in the number of authorisations, there was a large drop in the total seed of more than 50%.

#### Summary:

Overall numbers of derogations have remained relatively stable. However, the variability of the data coming through still makes it difficult to quantify this exactly.

We hope that the ongoing growth in the organic market, and in particular the increasing market share of local and independent retailers (where use of organic seed tends to be higher) will translate into bigger sales for organic seed companies and increased breeding of varieties for organic production. There remain key producers committed to organic production and some new companies entering the market for smaller scale growers, especially given the buoyant European organic market.

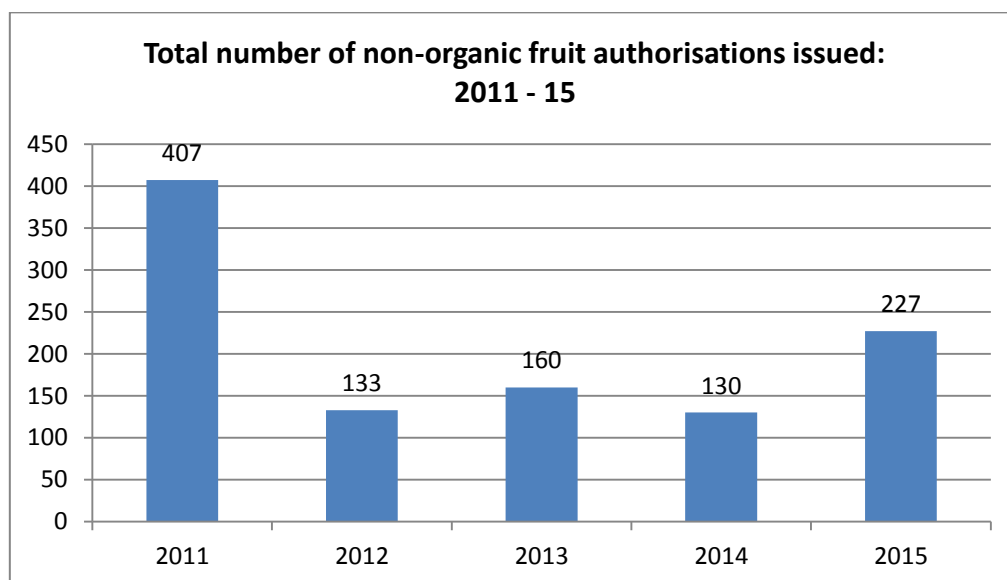
#### Fruit

The total number of authorisations in the fruit sector increased from 130 in 2014 to **227** in 2015. Other than gooseberries and plums, all of the main fruit species saw a rise in the volume of authorisations. For some the increases were substantial, most notably strawberries, where a 14,504% rise in the number of plants was recorded. Apples and pears also saw substantial increases. This is good news for the long term future of organic fruit as it shows an increased confidence in the sector. However, it is disappointing that these growers are not using organic plants.

Top fruit stock continues to be a problem, and there remain only two producers in the UK supplying relatively small quantities for commercial orchards – whilst also relying on amateur sales. Many of the larger commercial orchards will source stock (both organic and non-organic) from suppliers in other member states.

There has been a recent clarification on the definition of propagation material, although exactly how this will be implemented and impact upon authorisations is still being considered. In effect we expect this interpretation to eliminate this section of the report, as all of the species mentioned above will no longer be considered eligible for non-organic authorisation.

**Graph 8: Comparison of the total number of non-organic fruit authorisations issued to organic farmers and growers between 2011 and 2015**



**Table 4: Summary comparison of non-organic fruit authorisations**

	2013		2014		2015		Change 2014-15	
	Auths	Quantity	Auths	Quantity	Auths	Quantity	Auths	Quantity
<b>Apple</b>	63	963 plants	40	446 plants	65	18359 plants	↑25	↑17913 plants
<b>Blackcurrant</b>	6	12020 plants	7	11550 plants	12	24800 plants	↑5	↑13250 plants
<b>Cherry</b>	9	1813 plants 2000 seeds 3 kg	10	629 plants	23	697 plants 2000 seeds 1 kg	↑13	↑68 plants ↑2000 seeds ↑1 kg
<b>Gooseberry</b>	5	13700 plants	6	11170 plants	4	6900 plants 20 seeds	↓2	↓4270 plants ↑20 seeds
<b>Grape</b>	8	552 plants	2	200 plants	12	2470 plants	↑10	↑2270 plants
<b>Melon</b>	19	5510 seeds 20 plants	12	1482 seeds 0.01 kg	9	4206 seeds 0.105 kg	↓3	↑2724 seeds ↑0.104 kg
<b>Pear</b>	8	59 plants	23	44 plants	12	1172 plants	↓11	↑1128 plants
<b>Plum</b>	3	9 plants	4	152 plants	9	81 plants	↑5	↓71 plants
<b>Raspberry</b>	3	170 plants	10	504 plants	7	2075 plants	↓3	↑1571 plants
<b>Strawberry</b>	24	6860 plants 21375 seeds 0.002 kg	14	5310 plants 2000 seeds	38	775494 plants 1300 seeds	↑25	↑770184 plants ↓700 seeds

## Grass Seed

With grass and forage seeds, all analyses of year on year changes in authorisations need to be viewed against the backdrop of the current requirements for 70% organic seeds to be used within mixtures (by weight). This will generally mean that to be competitive, seed sellers have to maximise their use of the cheapest source of seed varieties whilst keeping within the regulations. For 2015, the figures suggest that overall the level of reseeding in the UK went up. By comparison to many past years, 2015 offered better conditions for reseeding in many parts of the country (excluding Scotland - where for many the summer was close to non-existent). In addition, many growers had been reporting low forage yields and would have been advised to consider reseeding to improve sward performance.

There were a total of **2,772** authorisations in 2015, compared with 2,963 in 2014 – a decrease of 191 authorisations (6.4%). Volumes of authorisations for the four major grass species increased by a staggering 33% (23 tonnes), with rises of 45% in authorisations for perennial ryegrass and 135% for Timothy. Authorisations to use non-organic festulolium species have stabilised; those for birds foot trefoil have risen, whilst for sainfoin have reduced. The increasing popularity of diverse grass leys including a greater variety of leguminous plants and deep rooting species has led to an overall increase in authorisations for such species, which are currently very rarely if at all to be found as organic seeds. Overall, the volume of authorisations for minor seeds (including such legumes) reduced by 3% compared to 2014.

The area of organic and in conversion grassland was 463,400 ha in 2014, compared with 624,000 ha of pastures in 2008 (temporary and permanent). This represents a 34% reduction over six years and is in line with the reducing attractiveness of red meat production for many organic farmers, with sales down in major supermarkets by some 11% from 2014 – 2015 (Soil Association Organic Market Report 2016).

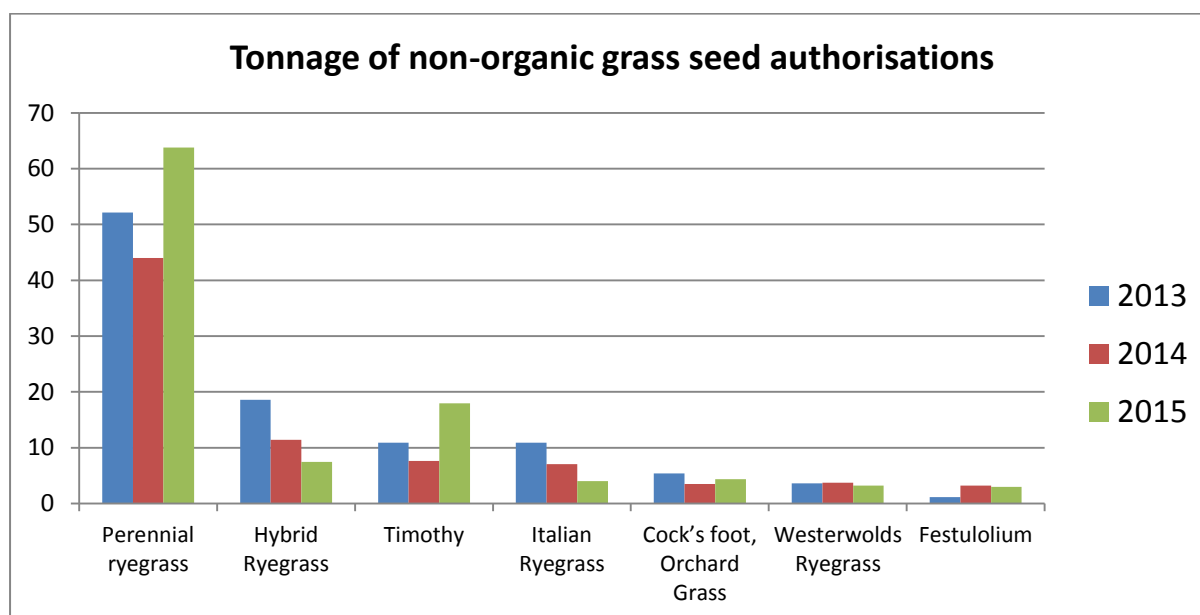
The supply and demand dynamics for organic grass seed remain complex and difficult to disentangle. Farmers continue to be looking for choice and value, whilst suppliers need a predictable market and reliable weather to deliver their products. As such, regular and clear information and data sharing is the key - something that the UK Seed Working Groups have committed to ensuring happens.

Defra approval has been given for seeds mixtures compliant with the agreed percentage of organic seed to be given automatic approval by all control bodies, with authorisations confirmed at inspection. That said, the same variety of seed may not be used in both organic and non-organic form within a mix. Seeds mixtures requested for use with a lower organic seed percentage continue to require an authorisation in advance of use.

**Table 5: Summary comparison (major crops) of authorisations issued for non-organic grass seed: 2013-15**

Name of Crop Species	2013		2014		2015		Change 2014-15	
	Auths	Amount (kg)	Auths	Amount (kg)	Auths	Amount (kg)	Auths	Amount (kg)
Perennial ryegrass	1390	52150	1254	43980	1213	63821	↓41	↑19841
Hybrid ryegrass	396	18600	264	11398	218	7459	↓46	↓3939
Timothy (Cats Tail)	541	10923	420	7622	334	17940	↓86	↑10318
Italian ryegrass	152	10915	140	7065	104	4026	↓36	↓3039
Westerwolds Ryegrass	38	3587	51	3719	53	3189	↑2	↓530
Cock's-foot, Orchardgrass	132	5385	111	3497	102	4330	↓9	↑833
Festulolium	22	1143	49	3192	71	2991	↑22	↓201
Bird's-foot-trefoil & Black Medick	233	2886	219	3082	225	3893	↑6	↑809
Meadow fescue	98	1912	79	2042	59	1729	↓20	↑313
Red Fescue	57	718	48	1038	29	637	↓19	↑401
Tall Fescue	61	939	55	915	45	723	↓10	↓192
Sainfoin (cock's head)	33	1754	34	653	28	104	↓6	↓647

**Graph 9: Non-organic grass seed authorisations by volume (selected crops): 2013 – 2015**



## Forage / Fodder Crops

There were **4,903** authorisations issued for forage/fodder/green manure crops in 2015. This compares with 4,836 in 2014 (and 5,485 in 2013), an increase of 67 authorisations (1.4 %)

As in 2014, the majority of all authorisations were for white clover, which it is assumed would have been used alongside grass species for medium and longer term grass leys. The volume of white clover authorisations rose by around 13 tonnes (41%), in line with increased levels of reseeding and use of perennial ryegrass seeds, whilst the number of authorisations increased by less than 1%.

Authorisations for use of non-organic vetches and alfalfa were down some 25% by volume but up 26% in number, with the latter figure suggesting that the use of vetches and alfalfa is continuing to spread across the UK. It is not clear whether the reduction in volume is a consequence of increasing availability of organic vetch and alfalfa seeds.

Authorisations for the use of non-organic alsike clover have risen by 45% (albeit it from a low base of 1.6 tonnes). Alsike clover is generally used within cutting leys and could be substituting for red clover in such leys. The volume of authorisations issued for non-organic red clover seed reduced by 8 tonnes (15%) in 2015.

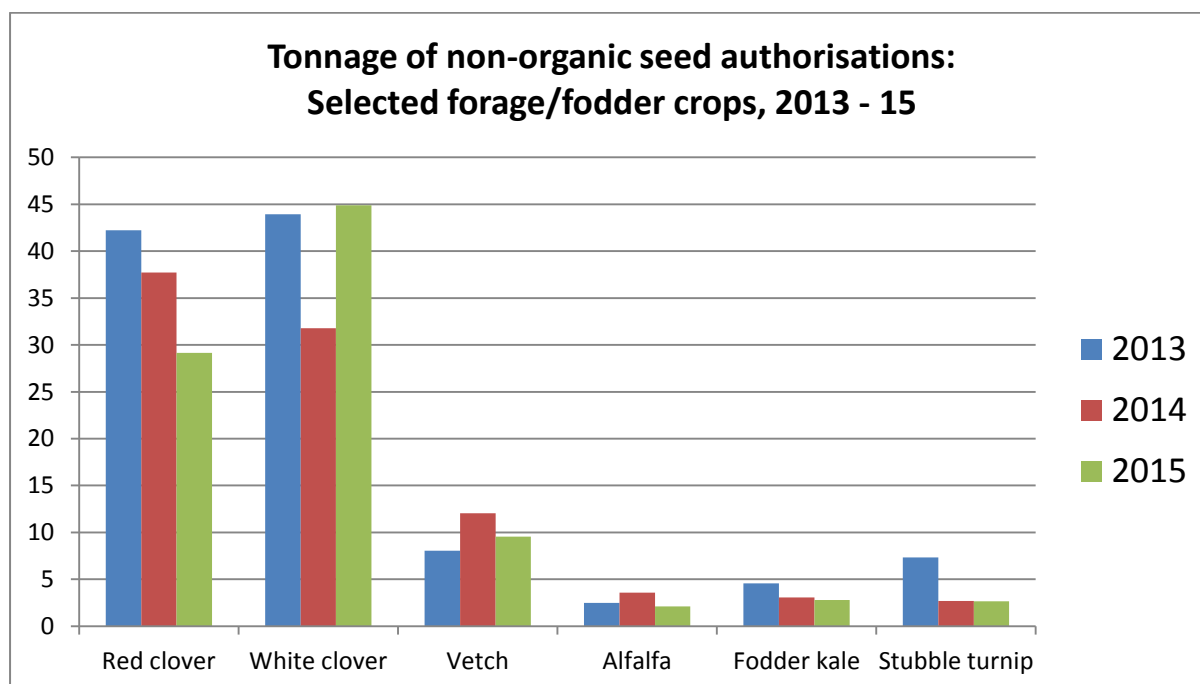
Cereals grown on their own or as bi-crop mixtures as forage crops are commonplace, but cannot be separated from cereals/peas/beans in the arable section - i.e. the authorisations for cereals, peas, and beans presented in the arable section of this report include those grown as forage.

**Table 6: Summary comparison of authorisations issued for non-organic forage/fodder seed (major crops): 2013 – 2015**

Name of Crop Species	2013		2014		2015		Change 2014-15	
	Auths	Amount (kg)	Auths	Amount (kg)	Auths	Amount (kg)	Auths	Amount (kg)
Red Clover	1066	42244	992	37733	964	29138	↓28	↓8595
White Clover	3025	43931	2775	31777	2793	44887	↑18	↑13110
Vetch	42	8035	46	12029	57	9536	↑11	↓2493
Flax (Linseed)	46	5299	30	4831	57	4926	↑27	↑95
Alfalfa	47	2479	29	3587	38	2087	↑9	↓1500
Fodder Kale	170	4572	165	3073	152	2780	↓13	↓293
Stubble turnip	141	7316	93	2692	83	2664	↓10	↓28
Alsike clover	108	1472	118	1574	133	2283	↑15	↑709
White mustard	24	1561	23	1398	35	713	↑12	↓685
Crimson Clover	40	1188	36	922	39	996	↑3	↑74
Persian Clover	17	185	11	170	11	85	0	↓85
Sweet Clover	15	265	12	121	21	269	↑9	↑148
Forage Beet	39	124	34	57	27	86	↓7	↑31



**Graph 10: Comparison of the volume of non-organic forage/fodder seed used**



### **Organic seed working groups**

The seed working group meetings have been held for a number of years. Chaired by the Soil Association, they bring together seed suppliers, control bodies, organic farmers, and representatives from Defra to discuss past authorisations - as well as assessing the current volume and diversity of organic seed available to farmers and growers.

A grass / forage seed working group (GSWG) meeting was held in May 2015, at which attendees were given an update on how EU regulation proposals might affect seeds. In relation to the above, questions were raised about the future of the UK's percentage based approach to forage mixes. Forage seed merchants restated their view that a minimum content of 70% organic content should be preserved within the new regulations, until such a time as the market is able to deliver more. After the meeting, Defra reported back that the EU Commission does have the intention to phase out the use of non-organic seed, but that this would only happen when organic seeds are sufficiently available, and not before 2024.

The potential for organic licensees to unwittingly contravene organic standards when planting arable / grass crops for livestock feed was also raised - for example, barley and grass seed being declared as a forage mix, despite this being practicably impossible due to the disparity in seed size and their being different crop types (annual and perennial). Defra subsequently contacted CBs about this matter, requesting that inspectors carry out an audit trail for arable/ grass crops to ensure that any authorisation requests are in line with current organic standards.

An arable seed working group (ASWG) conference call was held in April 2015, during which authorisations to use non-organic seed issued during the spring planting season were reviewed. Details around what should be included in an FAQ about the cost of producing organic seed (to be disseminated to organic producers via control bodies) were also finalised.

At a full ASWG meeting held in February 2016, seed companies raised concerns about authorisations for large volumes of non-organic seed being issued by CBs during 2015 when compatible varieties of organic seed may have been available. Following discussions around this issue, it was proposed an additional process be implemented when requests to use large volumes of non-organic arable seed are received, to help ensure that organic seed is used whenever possible. Soil Association will liaise with Defra and interested parties regarding this matter, with the aim of introducing a process prior to the autumn 2016 planting season.

Face to face meetings of the horticulture and potato seed working groups were not held during 2015. We have been sharing experiences from other member states to find a way forward for horticulture and potato seed use and will be reviewing this position during the coming year. We will continue to work with organic seed producers to promote their products to organic growers, and to highlight the risk to consumer trust of continued high levels of non-organic seed use.

Working groups have agreed that sharing of information is key, and have agreed to ensure that relevant information is gathered and disseminated as quickly as possible, with regular meetings/group discussions to help ensure that there is the best possible supply of suitable organic seeds to farmers and growers.

### **Seed for seed production**

The EU regulation does not require information to be obtained from control bodies relating to authorisations given for seed for seed production.

## The UK database: [www.organicxseeds.co.uk](http://www.organicxseeds.co.uk)

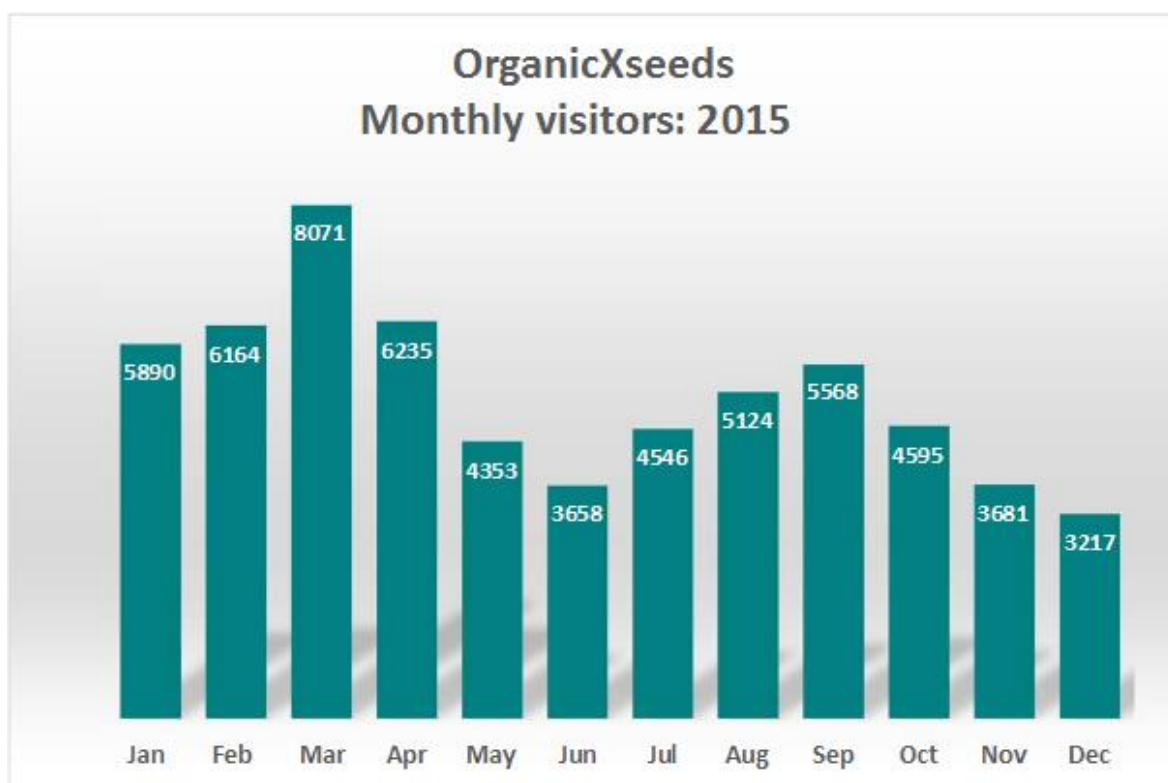
This database is a requirement of EU Regulation (EC) No. 1452/2003 which regulates the use of seeds and seed potatoes in organic farming.

There are currently 30 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 UK.

Seed suppliers can register species of organic seed and/or organic seed potatoes by variety via a login and password. They are regulated by a signed contract with the Soil Association requiring them 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. UK 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 of OrganicXseeds visitors by country	
Germany	70,5%
United Kingdom	7,7%
Belgium	5,5%
Switzerland	4,7%
Czech Republic	0,3%
Luxembourg	0,3%
Others	11,0%

**Online availability of the database during 2015: 99.6 %**

### **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) (**NB:** In the UK it has been agreed by Defra to modify Article 5(1) and use the following justifications).

- (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;
- (d1) It is justified for use in research;
- (d2) To test in small-scale field trials;
- (d3) For variety conservation purposes, agreed by the competent authority of the member state;
- (e) The seed is part of a grass or forage mix containing at least 70% organic seeds.

**Column 5**

The chemical treatment for phytosanitary purposes

**There are currently no chemical treatments allowed for phytosanitary purposes in the UK.**

**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 - "Final seed authorisation report data 2015" - summarises the authorisations granted in 2015 by all of the UK 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 Ben Llewellyn, Liz Bowles, and Ben Raskin.

Data compiled by Ben Llewellyn.

Seed working groups chaired by Liz Bowles and Ben Raskin.