

UK Annual Non-Organic Seed Authorisation Report for 2023

UK* authorisations to use seed and seed potatoes and vegetative propagating material not produced by the organic production method in organic farming

*(UK apart from Northern Ireland. In order to align with current (at time of writing) trading arrangements with the EU, there is a separate report for Northern Ireland. Throughout this report “the UK” is to be understood as “the UK apart from Northern Ireland”)



Prepared by the Soil Association on behalf of Defra
March 2024

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Purpose of the report

The UK non-organic annual seed authorisation reports (this report together with the Northern Ireland report) provide 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 to increase use of organic seed and comply with relevant 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.

The reports are compiled by the Soil Association on behalf of Defra. They are then made publicly available via the *Organic X Seeds* website (<https://www.organicxseeds.co.uk/>).

Summary of authorisations

The total number of non-organic seed authorisations issued to organic farmers in the United Kingdom (exclusive of Northern Ireland) in 2023 was **16,867**, a decrease from 17,259 in 2022.

Seed Potatoes

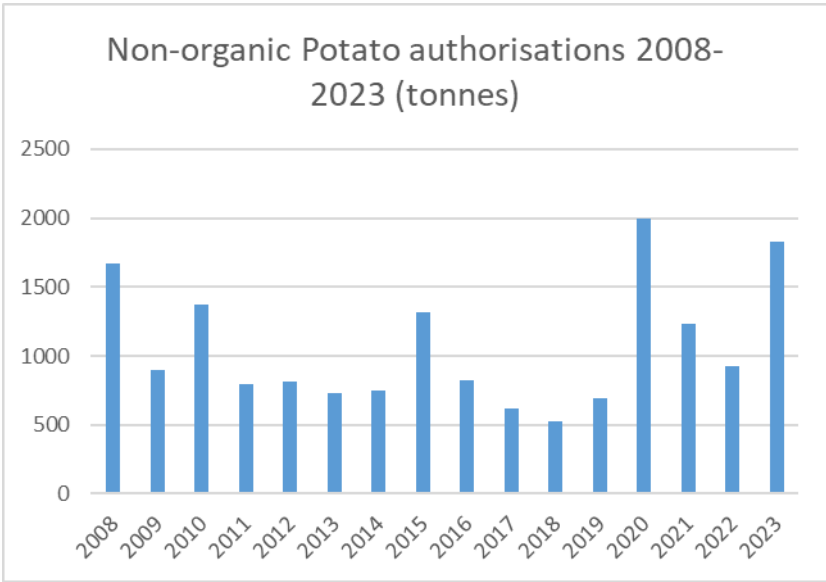
The total number of potato authorisations granted in 2023 was **131**, an increase on the previous year’s total of 104. The total volume for 2023 was **1,826 tonnes**, an increase on 2022’s total of 930 tonnes. The longer-term fluctuations are shown in graphs 1 and 2 and the overall figures for the last four years are given in Table 1 below.

The authorisations were spread over a total of 68 varieties. Table 2 shows details of the top 15 varieties for non-organic seed potato authorisations, together with comparisons for those varieties for 2021 and 2022.

Table 1: Non-organic seed potato authorisations issued to UK organic farmers 2019-2023 (all varieties)

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
number of varieties	57	68	63	50	68
total tonnes	695	1,999	1,232	930	1,826
total authorisations	85	136	115	104	131

Graph 1: Non-organic seed potato authorisations, 2008-2023



Graph 2: Non-organic seed potato authorisations, 2008-2023

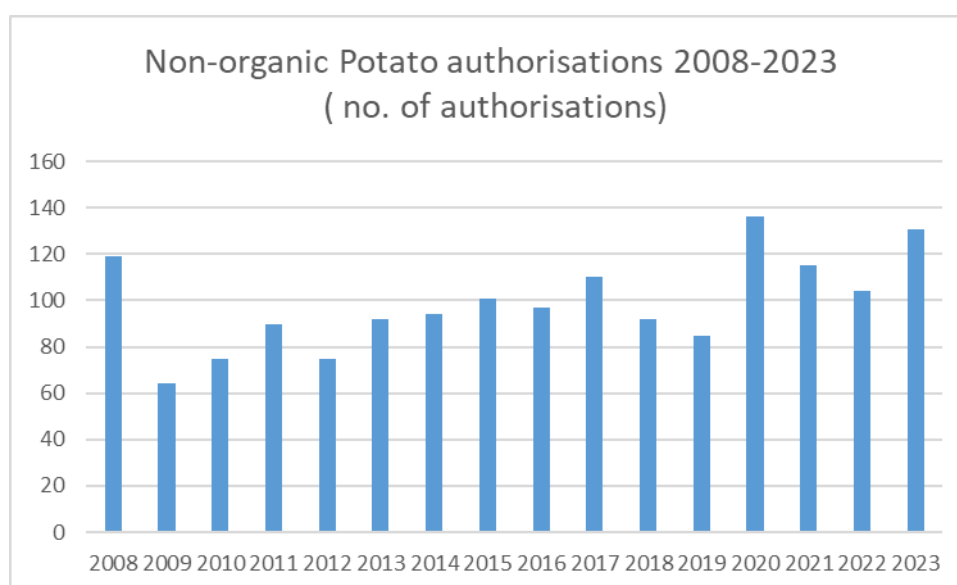


Table 2: Non-organic seed potato authorisations 2023: top 15 varieties, with comparisons for those varieties in 2021 and 2022

	2021		2022		2023	
	auths	tonnes	auths	tonnes	auths	tonnes
Alexia	1	100	1	28.00	5	291.42
Acoustic	5	67.3	12	151.9	13	289.4
Lady Balfour	2	104.0	2	100.0	3	165.0
Jester	1	27.5	2	20.0	3	145.0
Rooster	1	60.0	4	60.1	2	144.0
Valor	6	154.3	7	126.3	6	123.1
Jacky	1	10.0	1	5.0	4	81.3
Twister	2	11.3	-	-	3	77.5
Levant	-	-	-	-	4	50.0
Melody	-	-	-	-	1	50.0
Nectar	-	-	-	-	1	50.0
Casablanca	1	8.0	-	-	4	42.9
Carolus	3	6.25	1	4.00	2	31.3
Twiner	1	4	2	8.50	3	31.0
Jersey Royal	3	102.0	3	72.0	3	28.0

Arable and cereal crops

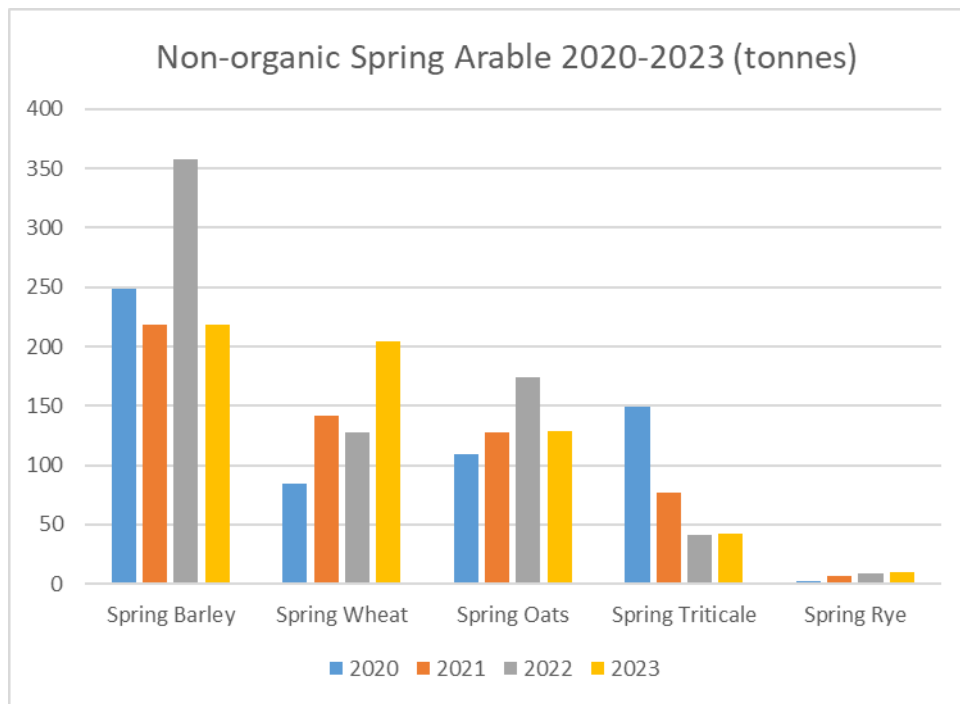
The total number of authorisations for the crops given in table 3 was 724, down from 854 in 2022. The volume for 2023 was 1,603 tonnes as compared to 1,988 tonnes in 2022. There is proportional fluctuation between the different crops from year to year as shown in Table 3 and graphs 3-5.

Table 3: Non-organic arable seed used by UK organic farmers: 2021 to 2023

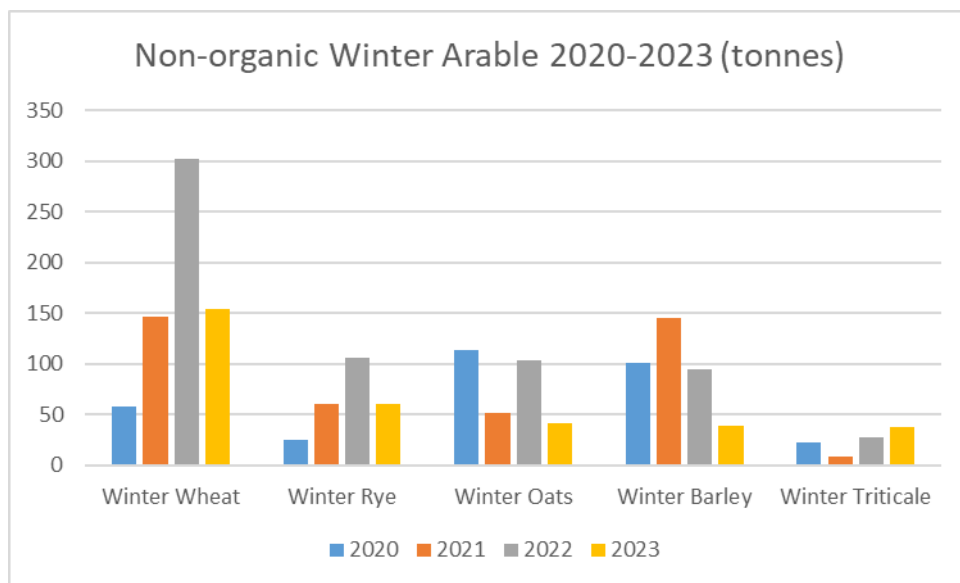
	2021		2022		2023		% change 2020-21	
	auths	tonnes	auths	tonnes	auths	tonnes	% auths	% tonnes
Field Pea	215	281.35	299	410.74	333	468.76	11.4	14.1
Spring Barley	55	218.38	116	357.63	61	218.07	-47.4	-39.0
Spring Wheat	19	141.32	20	127.84	26	204.66	30.0	60.1
Winter Wheat	137	146.06	94	302.38	50	153.45	-46.8	-49.3
Field Bean	49	160.68	44	225.70	40	142.01	-9.1	-37.1
Spring Oats	32	127.28	71	174.59	40	128.61	-43.7	-26.3
Winter Barley	35	145.47	44	94.64	27	95.99	-38.6	1.4
Winter Rye	52	60.14	64	105.89	57	60.63	-10.9	-42.7
Spring Triticale	66	76.42	56	40.89	46	42.56	-17.9	4.1
Winter Oats	16	51.81	22	103.00	22	40.89	0.0	-60.3
Winter Triticale	7	8.49	14	27.79	16	37.10	14.3	33.5
Spring Rye	7	6.72	6	9.00	6	9.81	0.0	9.0
Spelt	3	5.74	4	8.10	-	-	-	-
Totals:	693	1430	854	1988	724	1603		

(Note: some authorisations were given in seeds for bean, pea, winter barley and winter rye. These have been converted to kg and added to the totals)

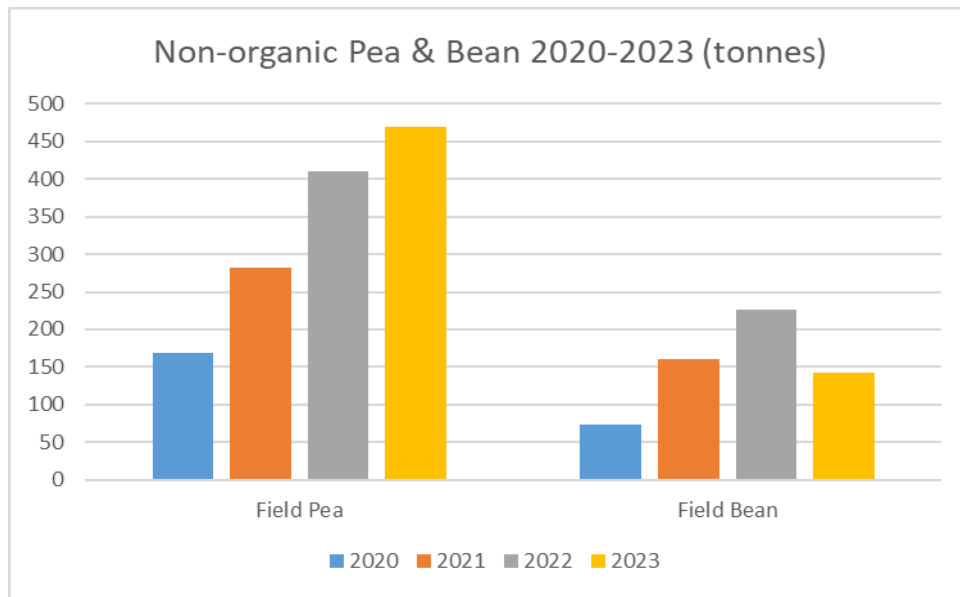
Graph 3: Comparison of non-organic Spring Arable seed authorisations, 2020-2023



Graph 4: Comparison of non-organic Winter Arable seed authorisations, 2020-2023



Graph 5: Comparison of non-organic Pea and Bean seed authorisations, 2020-2023



Horticulture

Table 4 and Graph 6 show comparisons for some of the major vegetable crops. The total of authorisations for the species in Table 4 was 2,381 rising from 2,225 in 2022 but reduced from the 2021 total of 2,642.

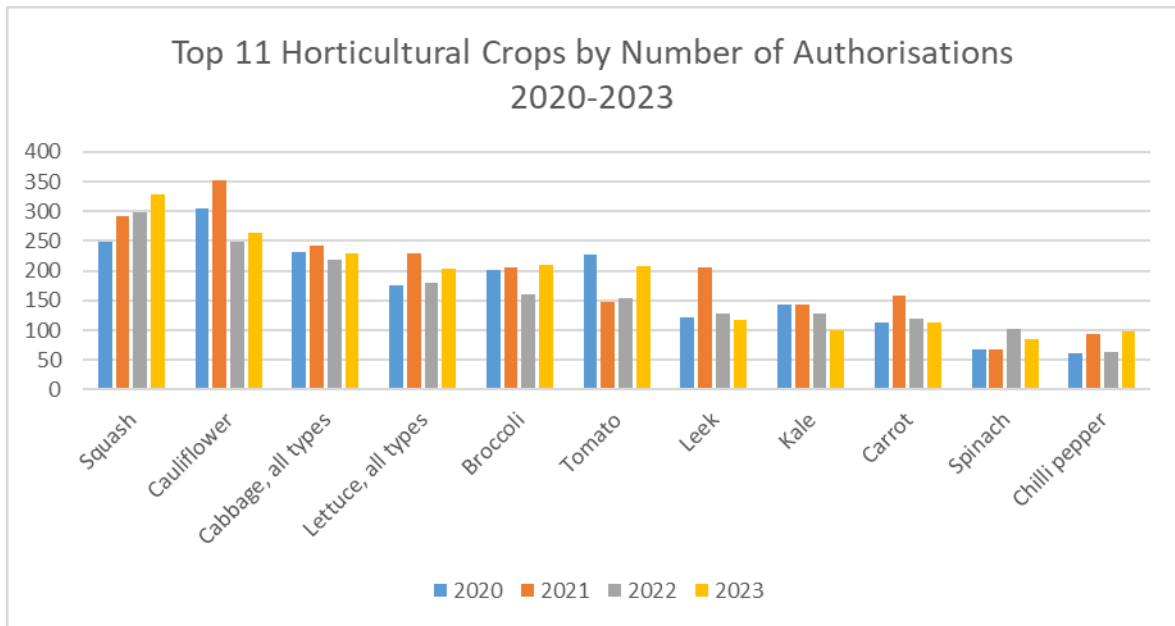
However, it remains impossible to show a simple comparison and analysis of authorisations for the horticultural sector due to the huge range of different crops and varieties, which are sold and recorded using different units of measurement (by weight, number of seeds/plants).

Single Seed Weights can vary across different varieties within a crop and so for accuracy, we have retained the original units of measurement from the authorisation reports and we have not attempted to convert them into a combined total in kg or seed count.

Table 4: Summary data for selected horticultural crop species in 2023 compared with 2021 and 2022

	2021			2022			2023		
	auths	kg	seeds	auths	kg	seeds	auths	kg	seeds
Asia Greens	51	98.05	43,960,318	45	24.470	1,060,144	38	4.150	29,097,804
Beetroot	92	92.45	91,068,146	75	515.606	49,811,481	67	26.685	79,043,455
Broccoli	205	12.62	40,186,455	160	0.15	28,664,423	209	0.16	52,186,123
Brussels Sprouts	56	-	358,517	42	-	353,262	77	-	692,905
Cabbage, all types	242	6.20	10,769,825	219	48.495	54,136,636	229	8.120	9,079,557
Carrot	159	0.13	1,080,042,260	120	0.803	846,484,689	113	6.550	825,215,130
Cauliflower	353	7.57	10,759,534	249	-	11,842,623	263	0.055	9,810,330
Chard	63	8.40	19,541,120	35	8.920	12,947,856	39	4.325	34,971,840
Chilli Pepper	94	0.01	22,459	63	0.005	6,926	97	0.005	6,883
Courgette	88	66.46	548,943	78	31.930	761,109	76	0.325	556,229
Kale	143	85.61	2,878,216	128	66.601	3,606,289	100	28.055	3,669,188
Leek	206	120.02	27,012,598	129	0.008	10,448,710	118	0.03	17,344,078
Lettuce, all types	230	20.07	124,641,024	179	3.463	142,031,960	204	0.067	147,999,147
Pak Choi	54	1.12	5,269,978	43	3.866	433,138	38	2.645	487,862
Pea	25	26.77	404,950	42	941.240	2,406,100	35	554.000	2,695
Spinach	68	35.12	1,628,953,200	103	0.025	1,216,451,000	86	0.045	1,499,400,000
Squash	292	2.91	1,257,606	298	0.832	468,171	328	0.547	2,739,987
Sweetcorn	74	-	1,853,067	63	30.033	2,291,752	57	0.010	23,239,370
Tomato	147	0.01	402,533	154	0.007	211,223	207	0.016	275,291
Totals:	2,642			2,225			2,381		

Graph 6: Non-organic vegetable seed authorisations comparison, 2020-2023



Fruit

Table 5 shows comparisons for the main fruit crops. The total of authorisations for the species in Table 5 was 197 dropping from 237 in 2022 and 223 in 2021.

Table 5: Summary of non-organic fruit authorisations, selected crops, 2020-2023

	2021		2022			2023		
	Auths	plants etc	Auths	plants etc	seeds	Auths	plants etc	seeds
Apple	95	2,552	132	3,464	-	56	5,162	
Apricots	-	-	4	8	-	2	9	
Blackberry	1	5	-	-	-	3	227	
Blackcurrant	4	22	4	31	-	8	170	
Blueberry	10	17	1	28	-	1	2	
Cherry	17	13,134	18	1,201	2,000	18	4,143	2,000
Gooseberry	10	80	3	26	-	10	76	
Grape	4	925	6	2,757	-	8	12,600	
Melon	16	3,670 seeds	-	-	-	10	-	1430
Mulberry	2	9	3	12	-	1	3	
Peach	1	1	2	2	-	1	4	
Pear	13	4,311	20	1,048	-	14	4,557	
Plum	16	5,398	25	665	4,000	19	1,201	2,000
Raspberry	12	868	4	84	-	18	682	
Red/Whitecurr	7	25	1	8	-	6	56	
Strawberry	13	204	13	1,905	5,200	21	37,442	10,000
Tayberry	2	6	1	12	-	1	25	
Totals:	223		237			197		

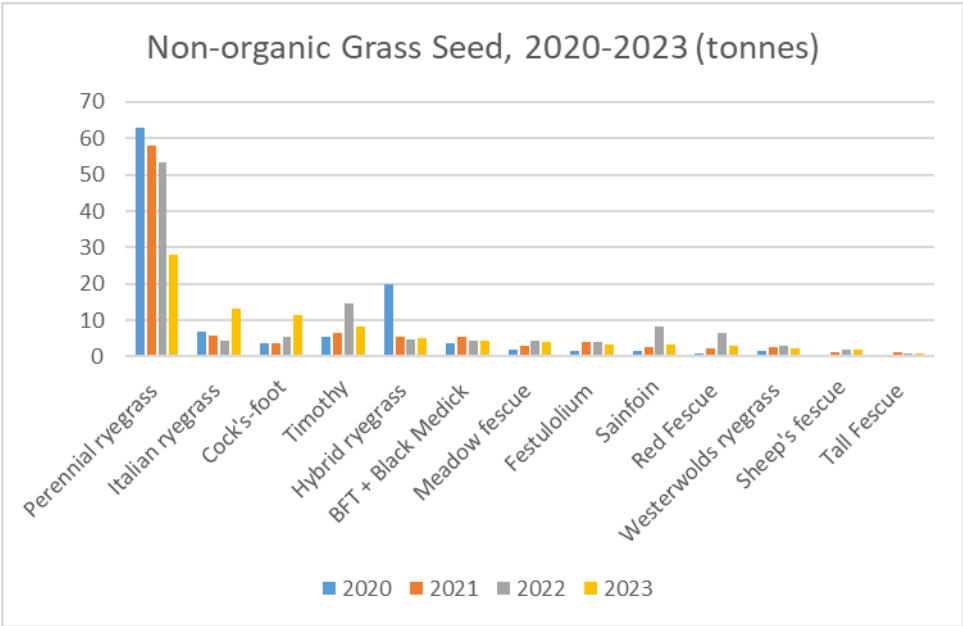
Grass Seed

Table 6 shows comparisons for the main grass type crops. The total of authorisations for the species in Table 6 was 2,360 decreasing from 2,653 in 2022 and 2,643 in 2021. The total volume for 2023 of 89 tonnes was a decrease from 2022's 115 tonnes, and 2021's 102 tonnes.

Table 6: Comparison of non-organic grass seed authorisations (major crops), 2021-2023

	2021		2022		2023		% Change 2021-22	
	auths	tonnes	auths	tonnes	auths	tonnes	auths	tonnes
Perennial ryegrass	1,305	57.99	1,014	53.34	785	28.03	-23	-47
Festulolium	72	3.96	99	3.89	94	3.27	-5	-16
Cock's-foot	107	3.61	138	5.49	120	11.26	-13	105
Timothy	309	6.65	330	14.56	331	8.11	0	-44
Hybrid ryegrass	129	5.32	104	4.64	116	4.94	12	6
Westerwolds ryegrass	41	2.59	33	2.82	30	2.21	-9	-22
Italian ryegrass	86	5.79	111	4.31	101	13.28	-9	208
BFT + Yellow Trefoil	274	5.47	379	4.49	399	4.50	5	0
Meadow fescue	100	2.84	108	4.26	102	3.95	-6	-7
Red Fescue	68	2.42	89	6.35	72	3.11	-19	-51
Sainfoin	65	2.75	139	8.38	106	3.23	-24	-61
Tall Fescue	52	1.28	46	0.93	35	0.97	-24	4
Sheep's fescue	35	1.29	63	1.87	69	1.98	10	6
Totals:	<i>2,643</i>	<i>102</i>	<i>2,653</i>	<i>115</i>	<i>2,360</i>	<i>89</i>		

Graph 7: Non-organic grass seed authorisations (selected crops), 2020-2023



Forage / Fodder Crops

The total of authorisations for the species in Table 7 was 4,974 in 2023. This was lower than both 5,480 in 2022 and 5,076 in 2021; the tonnage has decreased in line with this.

Table 7: Comparison of non-organic forage/fodder seed (major crops), 2021–2023

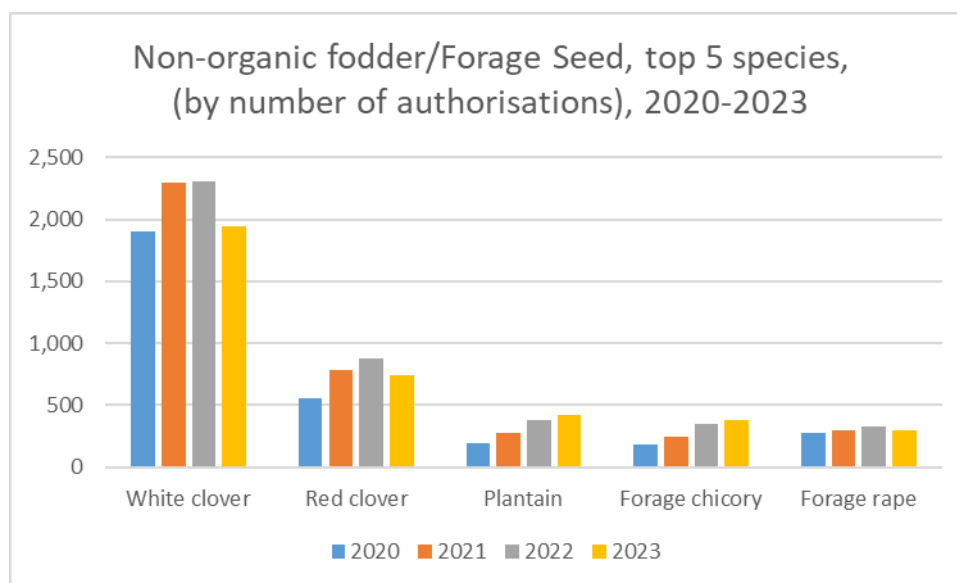
	2021			2022			2023			% Change 2020-21	
	auths	tonnes	seeds	auths	tonnes	seeds	auths	tonnes	seeds	% auths	% tonnes
White clover	2,293	36.82	-	2,304	37.46	-	1,946	24.71	-	-15.54	-34.02
Red clover	780	28.83	-	873	35.67	-	744	31.47	-	-14.78	-11.76
Forage rape	294	14.58	21,000,000	325	17.70	-	298	10.87	4,000,000	-8.31	-38.56
Vetch	118	18.85	-	146	24.08	-	102	9.08	-	-30.14	-62.31
Flax	68	3.17	550	71	4.02	120	80	3.32	1,700	12.68	-17.55
Stubble turnip	204	12.75	-	157	6.97	2,000	135	4.19	-	-14.01	-39.96
Fodder kale	158	4.15	-	156	3.78	100,000	174	3.02	300,250	11.54	-19.93
Alfalfa	72	11.07	-	83	7.05	-	111	11.93	-	33.73	69.16
Alsike clover	169	1.55	-	224	2.19	-	228	3.32	-	1.79	51.48
White mustard	49	1.27	-	67	2.39	-	58	6.53	-	-13.43	172.92
Fodder radish	133	3.07	15,200,000	102	1.51	14,000,000	112	2.00	-	9.80	33.00
Forage chicory	241	2.25	-	347	5.49	-	377	3.24	-	8.65	-40.97
Plantain	279	1.63	-	383	2.78	100	416	8.53	-	8.62	206.94
Crimson clover	91	1.03	-	123	2.15	-	95	5.98	-	-22.76	178.37
Balansa clover	53	0.44	-	19	0.37	-	19	0.97	-	0.00	164.54
Persian clover	22	0.42	-	35	0.37	-	27	0.10	-	-22.86	-74.37
Fodder beet	49	0.10	28,072,460	50	0.86	39,697,000	41	0.16	36,764,220	-18.00	-81.59
Lupin*	3	0.68	-	15	14.76	-	11	10.67	-	-26.67	-27.73

Totals: 5,076 143 64,273,010 5,480 170 53,799,220 4,974 140 41,066,170

*

Lupins are both a forage and a combinable crop and could equally well be placed with Arable crops in Table 2.

Graph 8: Non-organic forage/fodder seed 2020-2023



The UK database: www.organicxseeds.co.uk

This database is a requirement of Assimilated Council Regulation (EC) No 834/2007 and Assimilated Commission Regulation (EC) No 889/2008 which regulate the use of seeds and seed potatoes in organic farming.

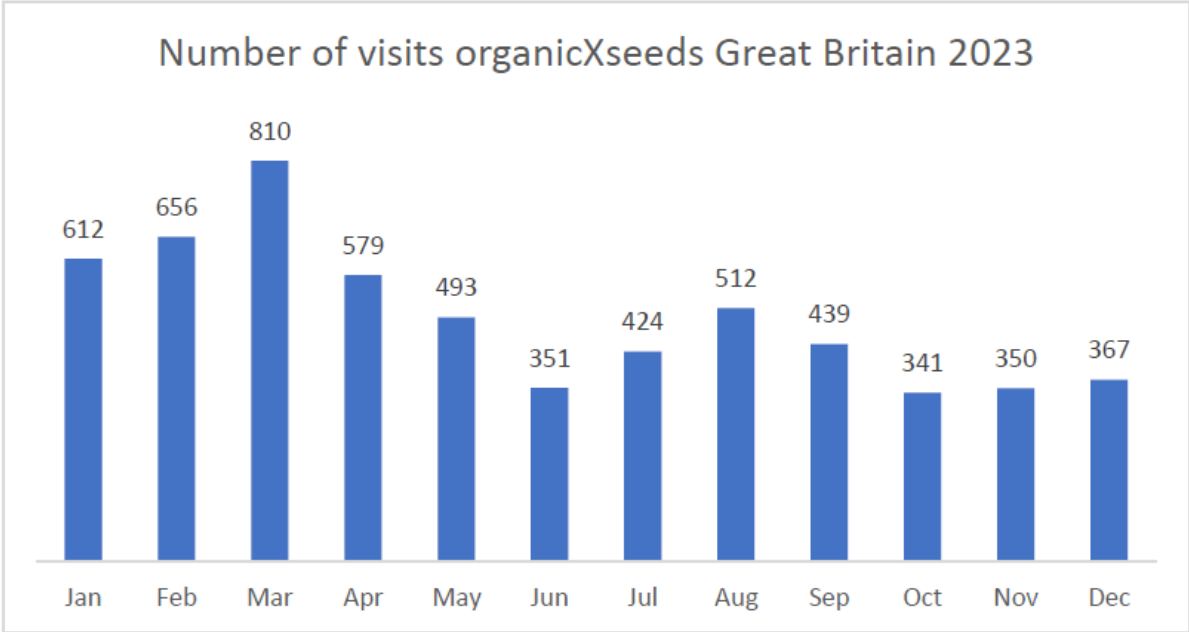
There are currently (March 2024) 34 seed companies registered in the database who are able to supply organic seed and/or organic seed potatoes to organic farmers and growers in the UK (there were 31 registered companies in March 2023).

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 are provided annually by FiBL relating to the usage of the Organic X Seeds website (which operates across several EU member states) and are shown in Graphs 9 and 10.

Graph 9: OXS Usage UK-GB 2023



Explanation of authorisation data

In accordance with Article 54 of Assimilated Commission Regulation (EC) No 889/2007, the report shall contain, for each species concerned by an authorisation according to Article 45, 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 45(5)(a), (b), (c) or (d)
- 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 45(2)

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 45 (NB: In the UK it has been agreed by Defra to modify the Article 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 48;
- (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.

[This column is informally used for seed-for-seed production]

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 - "UK Non-Organic Seed Authorisation Report 2023 Data" - summarises the authorisations granted in 2023 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 records the information as provided by the seed company. In addition, the A-E "reason/justification" codes have been recorded as presented by the control bodies, even though it is evident that these are often assigned incorrectly.

Acknowledgements

Report compiled by Martin Parkinson, Jerry Alford, Carolyn Coxe and Hugh Blogg. Data compiled by Martin Parkinson. Seed working groups chaired by Ben Raskin, Adrian Steele and Carolyn Coxe.