

alfalfa seed
sample costs
and
production



Agricultural Extension Service
University of California
Imperial County
Court House, El Centro

Cost Data Sheet No. 2

ALFALFA SEED--SAMPLE PRODUCTION COSTS

Mechanical operations at custom rates. Labor at \$2.70 per hour (\$2.20 plus Social Security, unemployment insurance, and fringe benefits).

Yield of 310 pounds of clean seed in 90 days on an established alfalfa stand.

OPERATIONS	Custom	MATERIALS		HAND LABOR		SAMPLE COSTS
	Rate	Type	Cost	Hours	Dollars	Per Acre
SEED PRODUCTION COSTS						
Irrigate 4x		water 2 ac ft	4.60	1.86	5.02	\$ 9.62
Insect control						
5x	\$2.50	insecticides	17.00			29.50
Bees		3 colonies	30.00			30.00
Defoliation	2.75		3.50			6.25
TOTAL PREHARVEST COSTS						\$ 75.37
Combining	9.00					9.00
Hauling	5.00/ton					.75
Cleaning seed	2.50/cwt					7.50
TOTAL HARVEST COSTS						\$ 17.25
Land Rent						50.00
Cash Overhead - 15% of all except harvest costs						18.81
TOTAL ALL COSTS						\$161.43

Cost per pound = .52¢

GENERAL INFORMATION

The average yields for non-certified alfalfa seed during the last five years has ranged from 191 to 285 pounds per acre with average selling prices ranging from 34.5¢ to 42.0¢ per pound. Certified alfalfa seed yields over the last five years have ranged from 204 to 440 pounds per acre and selling prices ranged from 38¢ to 54¢. A large part of the

certified seed is planted on beds. Yields of over 1,000 pounds per acre have been obtained in the Imperial Valley.

STARTING DATES

The best possibilities for a good seed crop occur when the last hay is cut between May 1 and May 15. By June 1 to 15 the field is in full bloom. Seed crops made at this time of the year avoid the Lygus, stink bug and alfalfa seed chalcid infestations which build up from early spring till late fall when the weather breaks. Late crops maturing to August and September may be damaged by rain.

Earlier seed crops may not bloom properly due to cold weather and seed "set" may be light or delayed.

VARIETIES

A number of non-dormant varieties are grown in Imperial County. Varieties that are resistant to the spotted alfalfa aphid, such as El Unico and Mesa Sirsa, are recommended.

IRRIGATION

Allow the plants to become slightly stressed for water up until the bloom period to prevent rank growth; after bloom begins, the

plants should be irrigated no more frequently than necessary to prevent wilting and to help produce well filled seed pods. The flowers of a slightly stressed plant contain higher concentrations of nectar and are more attractive to bees.

PEST CONTROL

Early season control of Lygus is necessary and more important than later in the season. Stink bugs can cause damage to maturing seed and should be controlled. See the Pest Control Recommendations for Imperial County Field Crops for more specific information on pests and control.

Control for the alfalfa seed chalcid has not proven successful and none is recommended.

POLLINATION

"Bees" are the only pollinators of any value on alfalfa. In Imperial County it is necessary to rely on honey bees because of a lack of sufficient solitary pollen collecting bees. Usually, at least 3 colonies of bees per acre are used in the higher yielding fields.

HARVESTING

Most seed alfalfa is defoliated using a dinitro general spray applied by airplane at from 1 to 3 pints in 8 to 12 gallons of diesel oil per acre.

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