

BOOK REVIEW

Tropical Pasture Seed Production by L. R. Humphreys, 1974. 116 pages (Free). Published by Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Rome.

This is the first book to be written about tropical pasture seed production. The need for such a book has existed for a long time, but with recent pastoral expansion in many tropical countries with no prior experience of seed production it has become urgent. FAO recognized the deficiency in commissioning Ross Humphreys to write the book, and one can only commend the organization for its perception and the author for his acceptance of a difficult task.

The difficulty in compiling a first book on this subject is that most of the knowledge resides not in the literature but in the heads of the seed producers themselves. The growers of Queensland and the Northern Territory have done the bulk of the effective research and development, and have accumulated an impressive body of unwritten lore beside which the fruits of formal research still appear rather scanty.

How well has the author succeeded in compiling, condensing, and balancing knowledge on seed production? On matters of basic husbandry the content of the book is sound. In the selection and interpretation of published work it is predictably immaculate. In the reporting of still unpublished information from a variety of sources there is a useful indication of things to come. But in the transmission of practical experience there is (amid much good information) evidence of unfamiliarity, particularly where recent progress has been made. Sometimes this is indicated by omissions or errors in emphasis; sometimes arguable points are stated as facts; occasionally statements are simply wrong.

In matters of balance, I should have preferred a few changes in planning or emphasis—a splitting of the grasses and legumes for most general consideration, the two groups having little in common; more attention to pathological problems with the legumes, particularly in the way host-pathogen relations interact with climate to determine the useful range of the species; and above all, an even greater emphasis on choice of climate for seed production. Success is ultimately more dependent on this factor than on any other. It has taken ten years for the seed industry in the compact and geographically well understood farming districts of north Queensland to learn where it can and where it cannot grow each crop reliably, and it is still learning. One wonders how often our early disasters are going to be repeated overseas, and to what extent due awareness will diminish their frequency.

The production of the book is cheap but, in terms of clarity of layout of text, tables, figures and references, excellent. There are errors in the typesetting, but nowhere are they of any consequence. The photographs, however, have reproduced poorly. Seldom do black and white reproductions of swards convey much to the observer, and the ones printed in this book are, if anything, below average. Indeed, it requires careful concentration to work out that the photograph of Siratro is upside down. Two plates are also captioned wrongly, a suction harvested Siratro crop being labelled "*Stylosanthes humilis*".

The faults are of minor importance, however. The fact that should receive overriding emphasis is that the book contains a valuable body of predominantly sound, eminently readable information, brought together for the first time. As such, it will serve as a framework for the beginner to build his experience on, and as a source of reference for the experienced. At last we have an answer for the bewildered overseas visitor who, despairing at the pearls of wisdom lost forever in the nightmare of verbal communication, so often plaintively asks where he can read it all.

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