

GETTING THE START RIGHT: WHY SEED MATTERS MORE THAN EVER



With potato production, everything starts with seed. It is a simple statement, but one that underpins every decision a grower makes, from paddock selection through to harvest outcomes.

Kate Truffitt : Potatoes New Zealand chief executive

While weather, inputs and management all play their part, the quality of the seed going into the ground remains one of the single biggest determinants of crop performance.

For growers across New Zealand, getting the start right is not just good practice, it is essential.

The foundation of crop performance

Potatoes are unique in that they are propagated from tubers rather than true seed. That means whatever is in the seed, good or bad, is carried through into the following crop.

High-quality seed provides:

- ✓ Strong, even crop establishment
- ✓ Better yield potential
- ✓ Greater percentage of tuber uniformity at harvest
- ✓ Reduced risk of disease issues.

That is why certified seed is considered the cornerstone of potato production, supplying the entire industry with reliable, highest quality planting material.

In practical terms, planting uncertified seed will affect the following crop with quality and disease issues and a marked reduction in revenue.

**THE QUALITY OF THE SEED
GOING INTO THE GROUND
REMAINS ONE OF THE
SINGLE BIGGEST
DETERMINANTS OF
CROP PERFORMANCE**



Why quality matters in the paddock

Uniform, healthy seed typically results in:

- ✓ Even emergence across the paddock
- ✓ Consistent plant development
- ✓ More predictable tuber size and yield.

In contrast, planting uncertified seed can lead to uneven crops, making management more difficult and reducing marketable yield.

Seed quality also plays a major role in disease management. Viruses, bacteria and other pathogens can be carried in the seed and spread throughout the crop if not controlled at the source.

That is why certification standards are not just about compliance; they directly affect the bottom line.

Traceability: Knowing what you are planting

As production systems continuously evolve, traceability has become an increasingly important part of the seed potato supply.

The New Zealand Seed Potato Certification Scheme provides growers with:

- ✓ Assurance of seed origin
- ✓ Confidence in varietal purity
- ✓ Verified inspection and testing processes.

Certification involves both field and tuber inspections to ensure seed meets strict standards before it reaches growers.

For growers, this traceability means fewer unknowns. It allows decisions to be made with confidence, particularly when managing risk around pests, diseases and crop performance.

Trust across the value chain

Certified seed sits at a critical junction in the value chain, linking seed growers, commercial growers, processors and markets.

Trust in the system is built through:

- ✓ Consistent quality standards
- ✓ Reliable certification processes
- ✓ Strong relationships between seed and ware growers.

When that trust is strong, it supports the entire industry, ensuring crops perform as expected and supply chains remain stable.

When it is compromised, the impacts are felt widely, from reduced yields to market issues.

More than just a seed tuber

Behind every seed potato is a lengthy development process. New varieties often begin as imported plant material, which is carefully tested and multiplied through laboratory and minituber production before progressing through several generations of field multiplication. It can take years before sufficient volumes are available for commercial planting, making seed production a long-term investment built on science, planning and trust.

International experience demonstrates the value of maintaining high-quality seed systems. Discussions through the World Potato Congress have highlighted how reliance on recycled seed in parts of Africa has contributed to lower yields, increased disease pressure and reduced crop performance. By contrast, New Zealand's strong productivity is supported by a commitment to certified seed potatoes and ongoing seed renewal.

Developing and producing seed also requires access to suitable land, with long rotations and strict quality standards placing increasing pressure on available growing areas.

As new varieties enter the market, strong relationships between growers and seed merchants are more important than ever. Importing, multiplying and commercialising new genetics requires significant investment and time. By working closely together and clearly communicating future requirements, growers and seed merchants can make confident decisions that support innovation and ensure the right varieties are available for the future.

Challenges facing the seed sector

Like the wider potato industry, seed growers are operating in an increasingly challenging environment.

Climate variability

Weather patterns are becoming less predictable, with both excess moisture and heat stress affecting seed production, quality and storage.

Biosecurity pressure

Maintaining disease free seed requires continuous monitoring and strict hygiene practices, particularly as pest and disease risks evolve.

Production intensity

Seed crops require a higher level of management, crop rotation, inspection and compliance compared to many other crops, increasing time and cost pressures.

Sector awareness

While growers understand the value of certified seed, there remains an opportunity to better communicate its importance across the wider supply chain.

These challenges highlight just how critical the seed sector is, and how much precision is required to deliver consistent positive outcomes.

What growers need to focus on

For growers selecting seed, the priorities remain clear:

- ✓ Choose certified seed to reduce risk and improve reliability
- ✓ Understand the source and history of seed lines
- ✓ Match varieties to conditions and market requirements
- ✓ Work closely with suppliers to ensure alignment on expectations.

These decisions set the direction for the entire season.

Getting it right from the start

Across the industry, there is a growing recognition that success in potato production increasingly depends on getting the fundamentals right.

Certified seed is at the centre of that.

In a season where variables like weather, input costs and market pressures can change quickly, starting with high-quality, traceable seed provides one of the few areas where growers can control risk early.

And in an environment where margins are tight and expectations are high, that early advantage can make all the difference.

Looking ahead

As the sector continues to evolve, the importance of seed will only increase.

Stronger focus on quality, improved traceability systems, and continued trust across the value chain will be critical to maintaining performance and confidence in the industry.

For growers, the message is clear:

If you want a strong finish, you need a strong start, and that starts with New Zealand certified seed potatoes. ●