

National Plant Germplasm Coordinating Committee
June 16-17, 2011

Report from Association of Official Seed Certifying Agencies (AOSCA)
Chet Boruff, CEO

I regret that I am unable to attend the NPGCC meeting this year because the topics the Committee addresses are important to our organization. The purpose of this report will be to touch upon some of our activities that are related in some way to plant germplasm issues and general observations for the Committee.

AOSCA administers five National Variety Review Boards...alfalfa and other legumes, soybeans, grasses, small grains, and sunflowers...that serve as the entrance point for new varieties as they are released into the commercial market. Plant breeders submit applications for NVRB consideration in a peer-review process to determine if the varieties meet the criteria to be accepted into seed certification programs. We continue to see active participation from the plant breeding sector, though the concentration of applications is growing from privately funded plant breeding programs versus public institutions.

AOSCA works with a broad spectrum of plant germplasm and in the western US this often includes native species and pre-variety germplasm that originates from wild collections of seed material. Federal BLM projects are large end-users of these varieties. Decreased budgets for reclamation projects lead to uncertainty, making it difficult for this sector of the seed industry to anticipate market demand and maintain inventories.

In December 2010, I was asked to serve on a working group that provided recommendations to USDA Secretary Vilsack related to the decision to deregulate Roundup Ready alfalfa. The group had good representation from the organic community. They expressed strong concerns about the long-term access to plant germplasm of major field and vegetable crops that would be free from contamination of GMO traits. USDA recognized these concerns and indicated that it would dedicate resources, if available, to assist in this area.

With the deregulation of RR alfalfa came concerns from the seed industry about maintaining non-GMO seed varieties for export markets sensitive to GMO content. AOSCA has initiated its Alfalfa Seed Stewardship Program and related mapping programs to help the industry identify where potential contamination may occur and document steps taken over and above routine certification standards to assure the contamination does not occur.

Trait stewardship services continue to be an active area for AOSCA and its member Agencies. We conduct on-farm assessments for all four major corn trait providers to determine how well corn growers meet Insect Resistance Management (IRM) requirements. Field staff members provide field inspection and record audits related to the partial deregulation of RR sugar beets. Several of our Agencies have added molecular testing methods as a part of their certification activities for crops that contain biotech traits and others are considering how to address these issues.

About one-half of our member Agencies are units of State government or related to a Land Grant university, thus, budgets are often limiting. Overall income from seed certification activities has been consistent and relatively strong, but extreme weather conditions across the US have cut back on some Certified seed acres and we will see the impact of reduced acre assessments in our next budget cycle.

Feel free to contact our office if you have comments or questions about this report.

Chet Boruff

Telephone 309-736-0120
cboruff @ aosca.org