

Greener Pastures Ahead for the Native Plant Materials Industry?

Submitted by Leanne Thompson on for SK PCAP

Saskatchewan producers looking for native plant material to use in seeding and restoration projects are often faced with a difficult task. Finding an adequate supply of the desired native species is often reported as a problem. Saskatchewan buyers of native seed sometimes resort to purchasing seed from out of province suppliers to fulfill their needs. These troubling trends were quantified in a recent report by the Native Plant Society of Saskatchewan (NPSS) that looked at the native plant materials industry from both the user and provider perspective. A complete copy of the report can be downloaded from the NPSS website at www.npss.sk.ca.

Chet Neufeld, Executive Director for the NPSS states “We knew that problems existed for both users and providers of native plant materials, but the information regarding these issues was mostly anecdotal and was difficult to quantify. This report provided a formal assessment of the industry and resulted in a number of interesting findings”.

The report found that 50% of native seed producers had difficulty finding buyers and nearly 80% did not sell all of their native plant material in a production year citing lack of demand as the major impediment. On the flip side, 66% of buyers had a hard time finding suppliers and nearly 80% of buyers had difficulty filling their orders. Additionally, 72% of buyers were not satisfied with the selection of native species available. Clearly there is a communication problem between buyers and seller of this product that needs to be addressed.

However there were also a number of positive signs identified in this report. The number of native plant suppliers that were new to the industry (in business for 1-5 years) was up significantly from the previous report in 2005. Demand for native plant material appeared to be strong and buyers indicated that they would maintain or increase their purchases of native plant material in the following year. There was growth in most buyer categories including reclamation/restoration, agriculture and horticultural uses.

Overall, the report found signs that the native plant materials industry is growing, albeit slowly. In his assessment of how to move forward, Chet Neufeld remarks “There are a number of ways that growth in the native plant industry could be spurred, but it basically boils down to increasing both supply and demand. Demand could be increased through financial incentives, policy changes at all levels of government and by creating more awareness of the benefits of using native plants. Supply could also be increased through financial incentives, as well as stabilization of markets, commercialization of new species and research aimed at improving all aspects of native plant material production”.

So what does this all mean for producers in Saskatchewan looking to source native seed? Communication between buyers and suppliers of native plant material needs to be strengthened. Stay in contact with your supplier(s) of native plant materials and let them know what type of projects you may be planning in the future and which species you are interested in using. Native seed production can be a finicky business and often it takes several years to harvest an adequate supply of seed from a particular species. Forward contracting, especially if you will require a large supply, may be one way to ensure seed is readily available. Also, as indicated by the report, there may be a greater supply out there than you once thought. The NPSS keeps a list of native plant suppliers on their website (www.npss.sk.ca) and buyers are encouraged to browse this list to locate potential sources. If you are a native plant supplier and would like to be added to this list, please contact Chet Neufeld at (306) 668-3940 or info@npss.sk.ca.