CHAPTER 14

Oat Seed Production and Distribution

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I. Historical

BEFORE 1900 most new oat varieties were introduced from foreign countries, especially from northern Europe (Stanton, 1956). Seed of the oat varieties grown in Europe was, according to Stanton (1936), brought to the United States by emigrants and also by commercial seedsmen. Many of these varieties were superior to those that had been brought in during the previous century; others were inferior. Little information is available on most of them. Reference to Stanton’s numerous registration articles on oats reveals that, if duplication of names is eliminated, only about eight oat varieties were selected or developed in the United States before 1900.

Systematic introduction of European oat varieties began in 1896 with the variety named Kherson. Lyon (1904) reports that this variety was obtained by F. W. Taylor of the Nebraska Agricultural Experiment Station, who had been commissioned to obtain seed of certain grains while on a journey through Russia. The Kherson oat was grown by the Nebraska Agricultural Experiment Station first in 1898 and again in 1899. In the spring of 1901, seed was sent out to farmers in various parts of the state. Each experimenter received two bushels and was asked to thresh the crop separately and report the results. This procedure was repeated in 1902 and in 1903. Some reports on the performance of the Kherson oat in 1903 came from persons who had obtained seed from others to whom it had been sent in 1901 and 1902. The reports on Kherson’s performance for the period 1901 to 1903 were generally very favorable.

In the introduction of Kherson there was no organized attempt to keep the seed pure as grown on farms, and there was no field inspection or certification. The seed trade was evidently not involved. The introduction was accomplished by the experiment station and cooperating farmers. After the first releases, seed moved from farm to farm.

1. Seed and Plant Introduction Organized

According to Harding (1947), Daniel Jay Browne was sent to Europe in 1855 to collect information, plants, and seeds; hence, he was the first plant explorer receiving Federal pay for his services. The United States Department of Agriculture began its inventory of seed and plant introductions in 1898. Inventory No. 1 (1899) lists oat introductions received through N. E. Hansen, and Inventory No. 4 (1899) lists oat introductions brought in from Russia by M. A. Carleton.