

NATIONAL SEED POLICY 1993

GENERAL

1. The Government of Malawi recognises the fundamental importance of a sustainable seed industry in contributing to increased agricultural production and diversification.
2. The Government will therefore establish, through appropriate policies and programmes, an environment conducive to the development of the seed industry. It recognises the importance of both public and private investments and the need for these to be prioritised. Direct Government investments will include research, training seed certification and testing. Private investment will be encouraged through policies which promote ease of entry to the market, fair competition and the provision of support services.
3. Government further recognises that its present seed policy is relevant to the current state of development of the seed sector and the institutional capacity to undertake the required activities. As this is an evolutionary process, periodic reviews of seed policy will be undertaken to ensure that it continues to be appropriate to the needs of the farmers.

II. KEY INSTITUTION AND OPERATIONAL LINKAGES

4. Strong linkages between Government activities in research, extension, quality control and the commercial seed sector will be developed. Government services will be oriented to strengthen and support the commercial companies while at the same time assuring that the need of the farmers are being satisfactorily met.
5. The use of improved varieties of seed will be promoted by public sector agencies, particularly the Department of Agricultural Extension and Training. Extension messages will be improved under the Agricultural Services Project demonstrations will continue to be organised to reinforce them.
6. The Department of Agricultural Research and Technical Services(DARTS) will continue to operate an effective and market-oriented variety improvement programme for all the main crops grown in Malawi. Potential varieties will be evaluated to determine their suitability prior to release.

7. The Seed Services Section of DAR will continue to play a key role in the organised seed sector. It will perform all the necessary tasks in the seed certification programme, including crop inspection in the field and operation of the seed testing laboratories. The Section will also be responsible for the enforcement of the Malawi Seed Act. It will test for distinctness, uniformity and stability (DUS) as part of its certification and regulatory activities and undertake the necessary applied research in seed technology to meet the needs of the Malawi seed industry.
8. Extension programmes at village level will encourage and assist seed production schemes that produce quality seed. The Smallholder Seed Multiplication Scheme (SSMS) will continue to be primary mechanisms for the development of seed supplies and planting materials for the crops which are not handled by the existing commercial seed sector.
9. The activities of the SSMS will range from the improvement of the traditional seed sector to the development of organised seed production through the establishment of Smallholder Seed Enterprises. These will rely on the quality control and training services provided by the Seed Services Section of DARTS.
10. Non-Governmental Organisational (NGOs) can play an important role in targeting male and female smallholder seed producers. Close collaboration will be sought with NGOs interested in the development of the SSMS and Extension Services and Seed Services Sections will provide technical support to enable them to enhance their effectiveness.
11. Government recognises that the SSMS required improvements in supervision, technical training, storage and marketing and pricing matters. The SSMS will therefore be reviewed by 31st October, 1993 in order to identify the measures which need to be taken.
12. Smallholder farmers are heavily reliant on seasonal credit for the purchase of input packages including seed. These needs are met in part by the Smallholder Agricultural Credit Administration (SACA). As the role of SACA changes with increased financial independence, Government will monitor the disbursement of credit for smallholders with a view to ensuring its availability.
13. The Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation (ADMARC) presently plays a crucial role in the distribution of seeds. Where the role is social in nature,

14. A National Seed Committee, which will take over and expand the activities of the National Seed Technology Working Group, will be established by 31st July, 1993. The NSC will include members from the research and extension services, ADMARC, Bunda College and other concerned Government institutions as well as representatives from the private seed industry and smallholder farmers.
15. The NSC will establish a strong and collaborative link between the public and private seed sectors. Its functions will include recommending policies and programmes for the development of the seed industry, promoting training and education in seed technology and implementing a buffer seed stock programme.

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

20. The existing Variety Release Committee will continue to operate under the Agricultural Technology Clearing Committee. The VCR will protect the interests of farmers but will not unduly constrain the entrance of new varieties on the market. Exhaustive testing under research conditions without assessing farmers' preferences will be avoided.

IV. PRE-BASIC, BASIC AND CERTIFIED SEED PRODUCTION

21. The production of all pre-basic and certified seed will be under the supervision of the Seeds Services Section.
22. In the commercial seed sector, Government is concerned to promote the development of competition for the benefit of the smallholder farmer. Any organisation or individual will therefore be permitted to produce and sell seed provided such seed meets the quality standards and procedures stipulated in the Seed Act and Regulations:
23. Government will conduct a study on the question of the removal of all remaining prices subsidies on hybrid maize and other seeds by 30th June, 1993. While subsidies remain, all organisations selling such seed will benefit from the subsidy as from the start of the new marketing year in October, 1993.
24. Government will review annually the need to continue to set minimum producer purchase prices and maximum retail selling prices for seed sold by ADMARC, in the light of the development of a competitive private seed industry. The role of Government will be increasingly confined to monitoring seed prices and the competitive behaviour of seed suppliers rather than directly involved in the seed market.
25. With regard to the pricing of SSMS seed, Government will ensure a fair return to seed producers by basing the purchase price on market conditions prevailing at the time of harvest.
26. While Government wishes to promote the development of a competitive commercial seed industry in Malawi, it recognises that quality seed of varieties suitable for local conditions are also available from reputable sources outside the country. Although Government policy will generally be to protect the infant seed industry from overseas competition until a competitive local market has developed it will review its policy on importation annually in the light of price, availability and other factors pertaining to local suppliers, in order to protect the interests of smallholder farmers. All seed imports will comply with the Seed Act and Regulations.

27. Government will encourage the export of seed for planting and agricultural crops provided national seed requirements are not jeopardised. Export regulations will therefore be kept under regular review.
28. Government will seek donor assistance for the completion of a recently begun seed sector consultancy, a key output of which was to recommend what further actions should be taken to promote competition, ensure supplies and reduce prices.

VI. QUALITY CONTROL

29. Quality control is recognised as being fundamental to seed production and marketing. The Seed Services Section and internal quality control systems of the commercial seed companies will undertake the necessary work to ensure that only high quality seed is marketed.
30. Seed Services Section will provide seed certification services to the commercial seed companies and SSMS, in accordance with the Seed Act. Government will ensure that the required human, financial and infrastructural resources are provided for carrying out the designed tasks. By 31st October, 1993, a review will be undertaken of breeders and seed production by DAR and the role of the Seed Services Section to determine additional resource requirements resulting from the expansion of the seed industry.
31. To the extent possible, Seed Services Section will meet its operating costs by charging for the services provided and such charges will be reviewed annually.
32. While Seed Services Section has responsibility for the enforcement of the Seed Act, Government is aware that some of the necessary regulations and other legal instruments required are still at the drafting stage. Provided the necessary funds are available, this work will be completely by 31st October, 1993.

VII. BUFFER SEED STOCKS

33. Government wishes to assure the availability of seed in the event of drought or other natural or man-made disasters. By 30th September, 1993, the necessary contingency plans for the establishment, use and recycling of the buffer stock will be drawn up. Such plans would identify the cost of the scheme which would be for the account of Government.

VIII. OTHER GOVERNMENT INTERVENTIONS

34. The NSC will encourage the inclusion of seed technology topics in the curricula of the University and Natural resources College in order to improve the skills and level of knowledge of extension workers and those who may enter the commercial seed industry. In view of the high proportion of the population engaged in agriculture, schools will also include basic teaching on seeds in order to increase general awareness levels.

35. Government will seek the assistance of interested donors to develop the seed industry of Malawi in accordance with the activities described in the National Seed Policy.