

An Overview of the Seedling Growers Association of South Africa Certification Scheme[©]

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BACKGROUND TO SEEDLING GROWERS ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH AFRICA

The Seedling Growers Association of South Africa (SGASA) was started in 1981. This year marks the 30th year for the association. The association is ruled by a code of ethics which can be viewed on our web (<www.seedlinggrowers.co.za>). Most of the members' fees are used for research.

Membership is from most commercial forestry and vegetable seedling nurseries and includes active membership of the larger forestry and seed companies. The committee is run by elected members with a permanent Operations Director Viv Quin. This year our elected Chairperson is Shaun Biggs of Sutherland Seedlings. Each Chairman is allowed to stand for 2 years. Our research coordinator is Damien Naidoo of Sappi Research at Tweedie, KwaZulu-Nata. The Finances are monitored by Ken Leisegang. The financial standing of the association is excellent.

The association produces a magazine "The Leaflet" and runs a website (<www.seedlinggrowers.co.za>). Both of these are edited by Mike Kruger.

History. In the early years of seedling production in South Africa the grower members had little knowledge of the technicalities of growing seedlings.

The association was begun with the intention to pool resources and research topics that were seen as problematic.

A massive learning curve was achieved by initiating research through the old Natal University. Professors Irwin Smith and Mark Laing were instrumental in guiding many students through research projects.

By the late 1990s research slowed as many of the grower members were better informed in the art of growing seedlings.

The Seedling Growers Association of South Africa Comes of Age. Although research will always be a cornerstone of the association's function the retaining of membership needs to be maintained.

The association through its dynamic committee looked at many other aspects to ensure a majority grower membership.

The Leaflet newsletter, the website, and the annual conference are not enough. Many nurseries felt that standards needed to be set that all grower members could attempt to achieve thereby ensuring that customers would be assured of a quality product.

THE SEEDLING GROWERS ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH AFRICA CERTIFICATION SCHEME WAS BORN

Certification aims for SGASA:

- To ensure that we attract membership.
- To present to customers a selection of members that have obtained a certified standard of growing plants/seedlings.

- To allow for control of members.
- To ensure that members are legally compliant.
- To allow for the control of situations such as serious pathogens.
- To provide an affordable way to allow members the ability to obtain a relevant standard for the industry.

Where are we with the Certification scheme?

- The scheme was started about 10 years ago.
- It was developed from the Australian nursery standards and the South African Plant Improvement Act.
- Improvements are currently being implemented by Dr. Derek Askew (SGASA) of Macain foods.
- It covers all nurseries including those growing in bags.
- Special needs will continue to be incorporated with the aid of other interested parties such as the Fusarium Working Group. Sections 19 and 20 have been developed specifically for growing particular crops.
- Eurogap certification is being combined with the SGASA scheme.

A QUICK LOOK AT THE SCHEME

The Certification Scheme consists of 20 sections that cover legal, growing and best practice that may be encountered in a nursery.

Basic items such as supply and quality of water and growing media is covered. Legal requirements such as the storage and use of hazardous chemicals and the occupational and safety standards are also covered.

Then some specific areas of concern that some nurseries have to deal with are covered in specialized sections such as Section 19 Pine Fusarium control and Section 20 that deals with *Phytophthora* on peppers. In future new sections could be added to the scheme.

Section 20 has been added and this deals with growers who grow capsicums and wish to be certified.

THE SUMMARY PAGE

See Table 1.

WHO DOES THE INSPECTION FOR SEEDLING GROWERS ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH AFRICA?

Without a qualified independent inspector/auditor who understands the nursery industry a scheme such as this would be of no value.

We have been privileged to be able to engage and utilize the expert services of Kobus Serfontein. He can be contacted at this email address: <kobuss@agriscience.co.za>.

He travels to all nurseries around the country.

Advantages of Using Someone Like Kobus Serfontein.

- He is a qualified plant pathologist and is also qualified as an auditor.
- Kobus is prepared to travel country wide.
- Kobus understands growing media, irrigation, hygiene, and most aspects that are problematic to nursery managers.
- Kobus is able to produce a report from the findings associated with the SGASA check list.

Summary page and minimum compliance standards

RATED FACTOR	Actual % compliance	Minimum compliance	
		50%	75%
Section 1 : Water – Quality		√	
Quantity			√
Delivery		√	
Treatments			√
Storage		√	
Drainage		√	
Section 2 : Growing media - Quality for suppliers and users		√	
Mixing area		√	
Storage & handling		√	
Section 3 : Containers & trays – Storage		√	
Disinfection of used containers			√
Section 4 : Seed store			√
Section 5 : Sowing records			√
Section 6 : Sowing room		√	
Section 7 : Germination room		√	
Section 8 : Plant propagation			
Stock Plants – Ornamentals			√
Stock plants - Ornamentals (B)			√
Stock plants – Grass (B)			√
Stock Plants – Forestry (NF)			√
Propagation preparation area		√	
Plant propagation area		√	
Acclimatization area		√	
Section 9 : Production facilities of nurseries growing crops under cover		√	
Section 10 : Nurseries growing crops in soil		√	
Section 11 : Agrochemicals storage and / or use			√
Section 12 : Imports from other nurseries		√	
Section 13 : Dispatch of seedlings			√
Section 14 : Product quality			√
Section 15 : General aspects & site appearance		√	
Section 16 : Health and safety compliance			√
Section 17 : Admin and financial controls		√	
Section 18 : Labour relations			√
Section 19 : Fusarium circinatum			√
Section 20 : Phytophthora capsici			√
Total Score			
Average Score			

Table 1. A summary of the 20 sections and the rating required by each section.

- He is able to advise nursery managers where they are having problems. This means that paying for certification will also make available to the nursery manager an expert to highlight problems that can then be solved.
- Through the continual inspections, of many nurseries nationally, benchmarking is available.

How Does the Seedling Growers Association of South Africa Certification Scheme Relate to IPPS Members?

- The SGASA certification scheme incorporates plants growing in bags. Similar challenges occur between both industries.
- The costs to get an auditor to all parts of the country are expensive. This can be shared by IPPS members and SGASA members as inspection times can be correlated.
- Specific requirements by IPPS members can be accommodated.
- The advantages of certification by the SGASA scheme will allow certified nurseries to be Eurogap certified.
- The two organizations will become closer especially in the technical growing aspects.