

## Vegetable Seed Production in Washington State

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I am pleased for the opportunity to speak to the International Plant Propagators' Society on the subject of vegetable seed production in Washington State. I always enjoy speaking on this subject which appears so little known or understood by the public. So, this morning I hope to inform you on the historical background of our state seed industry, to introduce you to Alf Christianson Seed Co., and to provide a better understanding of the vegetable seed trade in Washington State and the markets we serve.

The first record of cabbage seed production in the United States was in 1866 on Long Island, NY. Prior to this time all production of vegetable seeds for the Western Hemisphere took place in Europe. The first cabbage seed commercially produced in Washington was in 1896 in LaConner by Mr. Tillinghast. Early settlers learned quickly that the moderate summer and winter climate and rich soils of the Skagit Valley region were conducive to the production of high yields of quality seed. By the early 1900s it was well-established that the Puget Sound region was the most ideal area in the country for the seed production of cool season biennials.

Now, it so happens that since vegetable seed was first produced in our country in the Northeast and Midwest States, the major seed houses prevailed in the East. It was not until the mid 1940s that most moved their headquarters to the West Coast to be closer to the major seed production and distribution sites. Today, virtually 100% of the quality vegetable seed produced in the United States is on the West Coast.

Alf Christianson Seed Co. was founded by my grandfather in 1926. Alf grew up on a farm in Angelholm, Sweden. He immigrated to the United States as a teenager. In 1909 he took a job with the Charles H. Lilly Co. located in Seattle, Washington. Lilly was one of the leading seed production companies of the day, specializing in production for the large seed houses in the East. Alf managed Lilly's seed production throughout the Puget Sound Region for seventeen years. In 1926 he opened his own firm in Mount Vernon where we continue to operate today.

Alf Christianson has grown to be a major breeder and marketer of beet, cabbage, carrot, radish, spinach, and other crops. The company also conducts extensive custom contract production of vegetable seed for other companies around the world. In this case the company produces seed from the customer's stock seed returning the entire crop for sole distribution by the customer.

The major vegetable seed crops produced in Washington State today and their approximate acreage include:

Red beet	450 acres
Cabbage	600 acres
Carrot	3000 acres
Radish	3500 acres
Spinach	3500 acres
Turnip, rutabaga, collards, kale	400 acres

The trend for acreage of these crops is steady to slightly down. This is largely due to the fact that most markets are transitioning to hybrid cultivars for the benefits of improved vigor, disease resistance, yield, and general performance. Since the price for hybrid seeds is high, growers are adapting new cultural methods, equipment, and planting systems to conserve on seed consumption and optimize performance. Although commercial growers worldwide are using less seed on a per acre basis, there still are many opportunities for Washington state seed producers. All markets are demanding high quality, consistent supply, innovation, security, and trust. Our climate, grower expertise, and reputation in the trade put us in the forefront to achieve these objectives and maintain market share. The new world order is providing new market opportunities in many countries previously out of reach. These include India, China and the many countries of Eastern Europe. European vegetable production is rapidly shifting to Spain, Portugal, North Africa, and Turkey. We should not overlook the opportunities to do more business with Mexico and the rest of Latin America. No longer is vegetable production limited to local markets. It is becoming a global market for vegetables. Already we see large amounts of fresh as well as processed fruits and vegetables coming from south of our border. In many cases this is produce grown from seed produced in Washington State. Today all developing countries of the world are looking to make technology leaps in agriculture. This can best be done through the purchase of quality seed of the latest cultivars available. By combining this with reliable cultural information, even growers in these emerging countries can realize the benefits of the latest in modern plant breeding. At this point I would like to share with you some slides of Washington state seed production and some of the markets we serve.