

Sowing the Seeds of Success

By Janine Roelens-Grant

Larry and Christine Reaburn settled in Westmeath Township in Renfrew County in the fall of 1974. Larry was born and raised in Mulmer Township in Dufferin County, Ontario. And Christine was born and raised in Australia, and emigrated to Canada in 1973 as a Junior Farmer bride.

"We moved because there was more and cheaper land in this area," said Christine. "And we couldn't compete against the city dollar."

Today, they farm 800 acres in Westmeath. Reaburn Seed Supply Limited is one of five pedigree seed growers in Renfrew County. They grow cereals, peas and beans for certified seed. In addition, they grow wheat, canola, peas, beans, corn and clover as cash crops and run a finishing hog operation.

"To get established as a seed grower," explained Christine, "you need to be a member of the SeCan Association which keeps track of the acreages and varieties of seeds grown. You get your original breeder seed from a research station or the Ottawa Experimental Farm. This you grow for one year, and it is very important 'to walk' these fields."

"What you multiply from [breeder seed] you can put away as select seed for the next year. From this seed you have to take samples that are sent away for verification."

"The following year," continued Christine, "it is known as foundation seed. And this you can sell to SeCan members for multiplication. The last year it becomes certified seed which can be sold to the farmer."

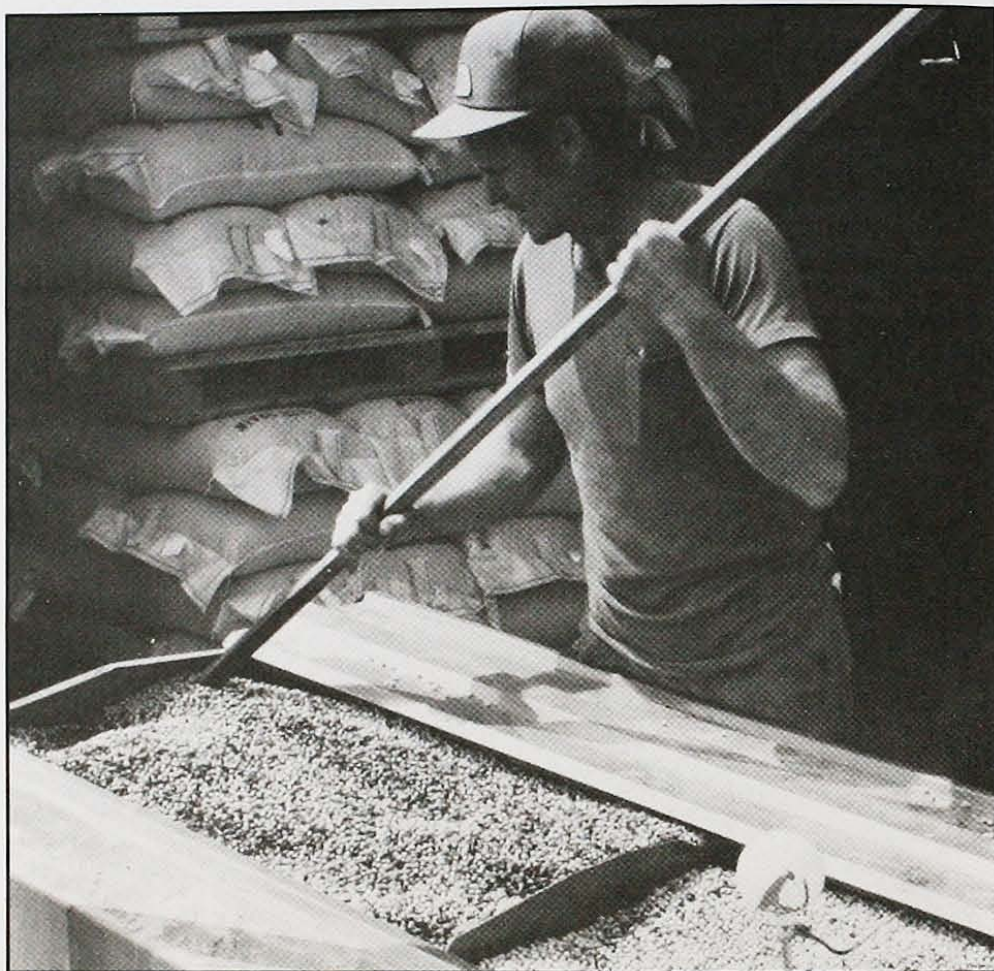
"It's a lot of work to put out the seed for the farmers," commented Christine, "and you can't really charge what it's all worth."

Cleaning and Bagging

Cleaning involves two processes:

- first, the seed goes through a big corn dryer that removes dust, weeds and other grains, and it also polishes the grain;
- second, the seed goes through a seed cleaner that shakes the grain over a series of screens or sieves that finish removing the weeds and other varieties of grain if there are any.

"The grain comes off the seed cleaner into a holding bin, and from there we do the



Larry Reaburn is pictured above preparing peas for seeding.

bagging," explained Christine. She noted that most seeds are bagged in 25 kilo (55 lb) bags, but some farmers still prefer the 40 kilo (88 lb) bags. "While Larry is working at cleaning and bagging," she added, "I do all the seed tags."

When they switch from harvesting and cleaning one variety to another, Christine emphasized that the combine and the seed cleaner must be cleaned to prevent contamination. And she added that the same holds true in the spring with the seed drill.

Treating and Grading

Some of the seeds, such as barley and oats, have to be treated for disease. And a sample of one hundred seeds is sent to a lab where they are tested for germination. "You aim for certified number one," said Christine. "It can be number two, but it drops the price. And

sometimes it drops to number two because of the germination rate."

Selling

"We primarily sell to farmers within Renfrew County and Pontiac County in Quebec," said Christine. "Some of the mills do buy and resell to farmers in the area. We run a cash and carry business; we don't deliver."

"When we sell peas for export a big shipping container is dropped off that holds 480 one hundred pound bags. We load it and it goes straight to Montreal."

When asked if the Reaburn family had a favourite recipe using one of the grains they grow, Christine replied: "It would have to be ANZAC Biscuits."