

How to Harvest Range Grass Seeds

Ogillo B.P., Kirwa E.C., Kidake B.K., and Mnene W.N.



Introduction

Over 50% of the pasture land in arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs) is degraded which has led to reduction or disappearance of natural forage species especially perennial grasses. This can be reversed through reseedling with adapted pasture species. However, there is no reliable source of seeds for naturally adapted pastures. Furthermore, commercial pasture varieties produced by seed companies are not adapted to ASALs. Fortunately, there are pockets (e.g. along river banks) within the ASALs where these natural pastures are available and seed can be harvested for reseedling rangelands.

Seed harvesting methods

Harvesting seed for small scale pasture production is manual. This is because:

- Tools used are simple, cheap, easy to maintain and are familiar to most farmers
- It allows for selective harvesting thereby achieving high quality seed
- It is labour intensive and therefore, a source of employment.

These seeds can be harvested by cutting off the stalk or stripping.

Cutting stalks

This involves:

- Harvesting the seed head and its stalk plus the last leaf, then
- Stalking in the field for 2 weeks to dry or the harvested stalks can be sweated by heaping them together for a few days
- Threshing

Advantages of sweating

- ✓ High seed recovery
- ✓ High seed quality
- ✓ Only light threshing is necessary
- ✓ Longer seed storage



Grass seed harvested by cutting with stalks



Grass seeds harvested by stripping method

Stripping

This involves harvesting of only the seed head without the stalk.

Advantages of stripping method

- ✓ Less labour intensive compared to stalk cutting
- ✓ Harvest when seeds start shedding at the tip of the seed head
- ✓ Seeds recovered require less processing

Drying pasture seeds

The harvested seed should be thinly spread to dry under shade. Thick heaps lead to heating and damage. Turn regularly (2-3 days) to aerate and prevent mould and rotting.



Drying range grass seeds harvested with stalks



Drying range grass seeds harvested by stripping

Seed cleaning

Remove inert matter (e.g. sand, stones pebbles), crop seeds, weed seeds and damaged seed. This can be done by mechanical methods or manually. After cleaning, the seed is ready for packaging and storing.



Manual range grass seed cleaning

All enquiries should be addressed to:

Centre Director:
KALRO Kiboko
P.O. Box 12 – 90138 Makindu, Kenya
Email: kalro.kiboko@kalro.org
Website: www.kalro.org/asal-aprp
Editorial and publication coordinated by:
Knowledge & Information Unit