

FGC-owned SelectSeed Co. Ltd. meets seed production objectives

In 1999, the Forest Genetics Council was presented with an opportunity requiring out-of-the box thinking. Having set a new provincial objective for the use of select seed (this objective still stands today; see figure 2) it was evident that seed orchard expansion was needed; particularly for lodgepole pine. At the time, Forest Renewal BC (FRBC) was seeking investment that would positively contribute to timber supply and quality on Crown land. To take advantage of this opportunity, the FGC created SelectSeed Co. Ltd. and structured ownership through the BC Forest Genetics Society to ensure the company would be controlled by Council and that any net revenues could only be used to support tree improvement investments on Crown lands.

Under the oversight of a board of directors reporting to the FGC, SelectSeed developed a business plan and negotiated a long-term contract with FRBC that provided capital for seed orchard development with provision for the repayment of capital when seed sales resulted in positive net revenue. SelectSeed's business plan set out an ambitious schedule to develop seed orchards to help meet FGC objectives. As SelectSeed is wholly owned by the FGC, Council set the expectation that the Company would also provide management services for Council, including business planning and reporting, meeting organization, facilitating committees reporting to Council, providing analysis, and representing Council on various issues.

Starting in 2000, SelectSeed negotiated long-term seed orchard agreements with five companies for the development of 14 seed orchards with over 35,000 ramets. Grafting was undertaken with advice from BC Forest Service tree breeders to ensure parent trees of the highest possible genetic quality were used. Orchards were then developed and planted on a large scale. A decade later, all 14 seed orchards are producing and over 1,000 hectoliters of cones have been harvested, yielding 470 kilograms of seed capable of producing over 65 million seedlings of high genetic worth. Nearly all seed has been sold to over 70 clients, including forest companies, BC Timber Sales, community forests, first nations, and woodlot licensees. The original SelectSeed business plan forecast total seed sales by March 2011 of \$1.3 million; actual sales to date are \$1.26 million, with additional seed in inventory. Production continues to ramp up in these young orchards and it is expected SelectSeed will begin returning capital to the FGC and the MFLNRO within the next 5 years.

This success story is a testament to the vision of FGC members who structured it in 1999, to consistent support from subsequent FGC members, and to the knowledge and experience of orchard staff who have kept orchards on track over the past decade.

Author: Jack Woods. This article originally appeared in the FGC Annual Report 2010/11.



Photos of SelectSeed orchards

Top: Picking cones for the Thompson Okanagan zone at the Pacific Regeneration Technologies Ltd. site (J. Woods)

Middle: Lodgepole pine seed orchard at the Kettle River Seed Orchard Ltd. site. This 11 hectare orchard is now producing high genetic worth seed for the Prince George seed zone (J. Woods).

Bottom: A developing spruce crop at the Tolko Ltd. site (G. Pieper).