



Scotia Seeds

Scottish Enterprise supported the research & development of new processes to help Scotia Seeds develop its product base.

Key message

“What we were doing wasn’t perhaps a very obvious fit for programmes like the SMART and SPUR grants, because it’s not very high-tech in the sense of the sort of projects they are used to, but it’s high-tech in relation to our industry”

About the company

LOCATION

Brechin

INDUSTRY

Agriculture

INNOVATION CATEGORY

New process

Innovation is not a virtue confined to high-tech sectors. Brechin-based Scotia Seeds runs a highly specialised business in cultivating the seeds of Scottish wildflowers for sale to specialist dealers and directly to the gardening public.

The business, the only one of its kind in Scotland, is acutely environmentally aware, working often to revive endangered species or restore habitats, and to enhance biodiversity. Giles Laverack, managing director says: "Generally speaking, we make collections in the wild and then we grow them on our farm as crops – we have about 150 species here, and about 200 crops on 20 hectares." The business has a staff of four.

Challenge

The challenge comes from trying to replicate reproduction in controlled cultivation. Giles says: "There is sometimes strong dormancy in wildflower seeds which can make them difficult to grow. Dormancy is an evolutionary strategy on the part of the plant, so that it won't reproduce until the time is right so some species are a bit less straightforward to grow than many domesticated garden plants."

Two further factors complicate the issue, he explains. First, the ways in which dormancy works can vary considerably between species. Second, because these are wildflowers, relatively little background work exists on their cultivation.

Solution

Scotia was awarded two packages of R&D funding under the SMART and SPUR schemes, and supported by Scottish Enterprise to put it to use. The funding, which runs until 2010, has allowed the company to work in partnership with academic partners to develop a series of species-specific

techniques to overcome dormancy and greatly improve germination.

Benefit

More predictable germination rates greatly increase the attraction of these seeds both to the gardening public, which enjoys a higher success rate, and to the trade, which avoids costly uncertainties in growing plants on from seed. Giles says: "Primrose seeds, for example, are quite strongly dormant. Dormancy can be broken by cold treatment to mimic the effects of winter. But that takes a long time and it's difficult to do in large batches of seeds. Now we have an alternative to that, which is much quicker."

Testimonial

"There is absolutely no way we would have been able to do this without Government grant money and Scottish Enterprise support," says Giles. "It's allowed us to employ someone exclusively for the project. We wouldn't have been able to do that because of the expense and also because of the risk – it can take a long time to work out what you need for each species and we couldn't have done that without support. Scottish Enterprise was very helpful."

Scottish Enterprise

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