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MS 157: An Evolving Story

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MS 157, the Malaysian standard for commercial oil palm seed, first came out in 1973. There have been four revisions since and the current fifth standard is MS 157:2017. The standard has greatly contributed to the massive expansion in palm oil production in Malaysia from the 1970s to the present, setting the benchmark for quality planting materials. Compiled without any legal power for enforcement, its clout derives from it being the pre-requisite quality for the seeds to be sold in Malaysia. The standard, essentially, specifies the quality for oil palm seeds to be planted commercially. Anyone can sell / plant any seed, but to set up shop to sell seeds, the sellers have to be licenced and the licensing requires that only seeds satisfying MS 157 standard be sold. Seedlings, including clonal ramets, are not covered. During the 45 years of its evolution, keywords have been defined and the definitions honed, and performance criteria revised for the different types of genetic stocks used to produce the seeds. The shift in emphasis from parental performance, particularly of dura mother palms, to that of DxP progenies mirrors the shift from dura as planting material at the dawn of oil palm growing in Malaysia to DxP from the 1960s. Clonal seeds are gradually increasing in market share but there are no specific provisions in MS 157 yet. The 2017 revision missed recent developments in oil palm genomics which could have strengthened the standard further, but this can be done in its next iteration.

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