Bent on improvement

By Mark Leslie

Glamour. That's what bentgrasses spell in the world of golf. The market size is minuscule compared to other species of turfgrass. Yet, more and more companies are vying for that tiny piece. Why?

• "I don't know. I think they have to learn their lesson," said Bill L. Rose, president of Tee-2-Green Corp., who has had nearly a corner on the market for 30 years with Penncross and its sister cultivars. "Two hundred pounds of seed can supply a whole golf course. The new construction isn't a big market. But everybody can't wait to get in it."

• "It doesn't make sense," said Dr. Milt Engelke of Texas AM. "I wouldn't put bentgrass high on my list if I was starting a business, because of the cost of creating such a variety and the limited market. I'd spend my time on something you can get volume out of."

• "Glamour, absolutely," said Steve Tubbs, vice president of Turf Merchants. "All of a sudden, it's a-churning pot, and everybody wants to get into the act. It's the smallest, most elite market of cool-season turfgrasses. There's a little tiny piece of the pie and everybody's going after it, with probably more products than have existed until now."

There appears to be an industry feeling that producing a bentgrass legitimizes a seed company. But it is a dangerous market to enter:

Superintendents' jobs are on the line with bentgrasses more than any other turf, said Kevin Morris, director of the National Turfgrass Federation and its National Turfgrass Evaluation Program, run under the U.S. Department of Agriculture in Beltsville, Md.

Therefore, "they have been reluctant to try something new on a large scale. It's been difficult for seed companies to break into that market because Penncross is so well established."

"If a superintendent has good greens, he keeps his job. If he doesn't, he loses it," Rose said simply. "Testing is long and tedious but necessary — in this world of bentgrass."

"It is such a sophisticated market, you can't just blow into it and make a lot of promises that you can't back up," said Tubbs. "These grasses have to be tested and tried for years before some golf course guy puts his whole course at risk."

But Tubbs warned that this striving for glamour may lead to disaster.

Seed research of Oregon, Lofts, Pickseed West, International Seeds, Jacklin, TMI... they're all coming out with bentgrasses. A high-handicapper can't 'pinch' a ball like a low-handicapper. The market size is minuscule compared to other species of turfgrass, according to Kevin Tubbs, director of Seed Research of Oregon. "There are big bonuses with colonial bents."

In the Pacific Northwest, the fashion now is to combine perennial ryegrasses with colonial bents for fairways and tees," Lynch said.

"They make a wonderful surface. It's probably a more fair playing surface for the higher-handicap players than creeping bentgrasses. A high-handicapper can't 'pinch' a ball like a low-handicapper. The market size is minuscule compared to other species of turfgrass, according to Kevin Tubbs, director of Seed Research of Oregon. "There are big bonuses with colonial bents."

• "It doesn't make sense," said Dr. Milt Engelke of Texas AM. "I wouldn't put bentgrass high on my list if I was starting a business, because of the cost of creating such a variety and the limited market. I'd spend my time on something you can get volume out of."

• "Glamour, absolutely," said Steve Tubbs, vice president of Turf Merchants. "All of a sudden, it's a-churning pot, and everybody wants to get into the act. It's the smallest, most elite market of cool-season turfgrasses. There's a little tiny piece of the pie and everybody's going after it, with probably more products than have existed until now."

There appears to be an industry feeling that producing a bentgrass legitimizes a seed company. But it is a dangerous market to enter:

Superintendents' jobs are on the line with bentgrasses more than any other turf, said Kevin Morris, director of the National Turfgrass Federation and its National Turfgrass Evaluation Program, run under the U.S. Department of Agriculture in Beltsville, Md.

Therefore, "they have been reluctant to try something new on a large scale. It's been difficult for seed companies to break into that market because Penncross is so well established."

"If a superintendent has good greens, he keeps his job. If he doesn't, he loses it," Rose said simply. "Testing is long and tedious but necessary — in this world of bentgrass."

"It is such a sophisticated market, you can't just blow into it and make a lot of promises that you can't back up," said Tubbs. "These grasses have to be tested and tried for years before some golf course guy puts his whole course at risk."

But Tubbs warned that this striving for glamour may lead to disaster.

Seed research of Oregon, Lofts, Pickseed West, International Seeds, Jacklin, TMI... they're all coming out with bentgrasses. A high-handicapper can't 'pinch' a ball like a low-handicapper. The market size is minuscule compared to other species of turfgrass, according to Kevin Tubbs, director of Seed Research of Oregon. "There are big bonuses with colonial bents."

In the Pacific Northwest, the fashion now is to combine perennial ryegrasses with colonial bents for fairways and tees," Lynch said.

"They make a wonderful surface. It's probably a more fair playing surface for the higher-handicap players than creeping bentgrasses. A high-handicapper can't 'pinch' a ball like a low-handicapper. The market size is minuscule compared to other species of turfgrass, according to Kevin Tubbs, director of Seed Research of Oregon. "There are big bonuses with colonial bents."

Researchers reap seed harvest in China

By Peter Blais

PEOPLES REPUBLIC OF CHINA — The roads may be a mess and agricultural technology behind the times, but the PRC has one of the best phone systems in the world. Why?

"China didn't have to go through the learning curve we did in the United States," said Dr. Milton Engelke, one of four U.S. researchers who spent three weeks last summer collecting various turfgrasses in south and central China. "There are no telephone poles or underground cable lines. The phone system is relatively new and calls are made via microwave."

Likewise, the Chinese golf industry will benefit from its late entry into the game and the efforts of researchers like Engelke. The Texas A&M University professor expects last summer's turf search to result in new strains of grass that will show up in China within the next five to seven years.

Why?

"China didn't have to go through the learning curve we did in the United States," said Dr. Milton Engelke, one of four U.S. researchers who spent three weeks last summer collecting various turfgrasses in south and central China. "There are no telephone poles or underground cable lines. The phone system is relatively new and calls are made via microwave."

Likewise, the Chinese golf industry will benefit from its late entry into the game and the efforts of researchers like Engelke. The Texas A&M University professor expects last summer's turf search to result in new strains of grass that will show up in China within the next five to seven years.

Why?

"China didn't have to go through the learning curve we did in the United States," said Dr. Milton Engelke, one of four U.S. researchers who spent three weeks last summer collecting various turfgrasses in south and central China. "There are no telephone poles or underground cable lines. The phone system is relatively new and calls are made via microwave."

Likewise, the Chinese golf industry will benefit from its late entry into the game and the efforts of researchers like Engelke. The Texas A&M University professor expects last summer's turf search to result in new strains of grass that will show up in China within the next five to seven years.

Why?

"China didn't have to go through the learning curve we did in the United States," said Dr. Milton Engelke, one of four U.S. researchers who spent three weeks last summer collecting various turfgrasses in south and central China. "There are no telephone poles or underground cable lines. The phone system is relatively new and calls are made via microwave."

Likewise, the Chinese golf industry will benefit from its late entry into the game and the efforts of researchers like Engelke. The Texas A&M University professor expects last summer's turf search to result in new strains of grass that will show up in China within the next five to seven years.

Why?

"China didn't have to go through the learning curve we did in the United States," said Dr. Milton Engelke, one of four U.S. researchers who spent three weeks last summer collecting various turfgrasses in south and central China. "There are no telephone poles or underground cable lines. The phone system is relatively new and calls are made via microwave."

Likewise, the Chinese golf industry will benefit from its late entry into the game and the efforts of researchers like Engelke. The Texas A&M University professor expects last summer's turf search to result in new strains of grass that will show up in China within the next five to seven years.

Why?

"China didn't have to go through the learning curve we did in the United States," said Dr. Milton Engelke, one of four U.S. researchers who spent three weeks last summer collecting various turfgrasses in south and central China. "There are no telephone poles or underground cable lines. The phone system is relatively new and calls are made via microwave."

Likewise, the Chinese golf industry will benefit from its late entry into the game and the efforts of researchers like Engelke. The Texas A&M University professor expects last summer's turf search to result in new strains of grass that will show up in China within the next five to seven years.

Why?

"China didn't have to go through the learning curve we did in the United States," said Dr. Milton Engelke, one of four U.S. researchers who spent three weeks last summer collecting various turfgrasses in south and central China. "There are no telephone poles or underground cable lines. The phone system is relatively new and calls are made via microwave."

Likewise, the Chinese golf industry will benefit from its late entry into the game and the efforts of researchers like Engelke. The Texas A&M University professor expects last summer's turf search to result in new strains of grass that will show up in China within the next five to seven years.

Why?

"China didn't have to go through the learning curve we did in the United States," said Dr. Milton Engelke, one of four U.S. researchers who spent three weeks last summer collecting various turfgrasses in south and central China. "There are no telephone poles or underground cable lines. The phone system is relatively new and calls are made via microwave."

Likewise, the Chinese golf industry will benefit from its late entry into the game and the efforts of researchers like Engelke. The Texas A&M University professor expects last summer's turf search to result in new strains of grass that will show up in China within the next five to seven years.

Why?

"China didn't have to go through the learning curve we did in the United States," said Dr. Milton Engelke, one of four U.S. researchers who spent three weeks last summer collecting various turfgrasses in south and central China. "There are no telephone poles or underground cable lines. The phone system is relatively new and calls are made via microwave."

Likewise, the Chinese golf industry will benefit from its late entry into the game and the efforts of researchers like Engelke. The Texas A&M University professor expects last summer's turf search to result in new strains of grass that will show up in China within the next five to seven years.
China has ‘wealth’ of material thought useful to the West

Continued from page 23

USGA representative wrote in his report to the U.S Department of Agriculture, the agency that sponsored the trip.

"Most of the Zoysia material found had been imported into the PRC [Peoples Republic of China] from adjacent South China Sea countries, although some of the collections were likely indigenous types."

Added Engelke: "We collected some zoysiagrasses we’d never seen before. Zoysias will play an increasingly important part on U.S. courses."

The team also collected specimens of bentgrass, centipedegrass and even buffalograss apparently imported from the United States several years earlier.

Collecting germplasm was one of two purposes of the trip. The other was to develop cooperative relationships with Chinese plant scientists that would foster further interaction in turfgrass research programs in both countries.

"Everybody gains by sharing our [U.S.] talents [turfgrass expertise] and their resources to develop new varieties. The Chinese end up with state-of-the-art grasses without the development costs and we end up with better turf for U.S. courses," Engelke said.

The Americans spoke to scientists at the South China Agricultural University in Guangzhou; Xiaoshiao Grass Research Center in Xian, China; Yunnan Province; Kunming Institute of Botany; Nanjing Agricultural University; Jiangsu Jurong Agricultural School; Green Sea Turfgrass Construction Co. in Nanjing; and the PRC National Germplasm Facility.

Their Chinese hosts and the scientists at each facility were very cooperative, according to Kenna.

"We spent more time with animal scientists than with plant scientists because animal husbandry is charged with producing forage for livestock," Kenna wrote. "The turfgrass programs seem to be an extension of some of the forage research programs."

"We were able to see only one golf course operation during the entire three weeks because of a lack of knowledge on the part of our hosts on where the facilities were or an unwillingness to call and get to see how the course was maintained."

Engelke blamed the lack of golf course access on the government bureaucracy’s perception that golf is still an elitist activity and developers’ suspicions of any government-sponsored officials wandering around their operations. The one they did see had been under construction five years, slowed by government regulations and lack of infrastructure. Some earthmoving had been completed for the driving range while the course opening is likely years away, Kenna said.

There are only about 20 golf courses in China, although dozens more are on the drawing board. It is often seen as the next boom area for Asia-Pacific golf development "As the Chinese golf industry develops, they will need the cooperation of the Western turfgrass industry," Taliaferro said. "They have a wealth of genetic material that Western scientists would love to examine."

"Fostering cooperation between scientists and industry in the two countries couldn’t help but aid the Chinese. They are importing golf course grasses now and paying little attention to what they have right there."

Engelke hopes to return in 1995 to the north coast between Shanghai and Beijing "where we know there are zoysiagrasses with the characteristics and texture we’re looking for."

"It was a successful trip," Taliaferro said, "because it provided a basis for future germplasm collections and established substantive relationships between scientists in the two countries."

There is a wealth of material useful to the West

‘We collected some zoysiagrasses we’d never seen before. Zoysias will play an increasingly important part on U.S. courses.’

— Dr. Milt Engelke

Creeping bent #1 in Oregon

SALEM, Ore.—Creeping bentgrass is the highest-value farm commodity produced in Oregon, according to the state’s Department of Agriculture and Marketing Division.

Average grass seed from the Willamette Valley has a value of $1,500 per ton, whereas creeping bent can be valued as high as $30,000 per ton in places like Japan.

Word is spreading almost as fast as our bentgrasses.

Joseph M. Hahn, Golf Course Superintendent
Oak Hill Country Club
Rochester, New York

Garrett Deck, Golf Course Superintendent
The Harvest Golf Course
Kelowna, BC, Canada

Mr. S. Nakano, Greenskeeper
Kouraku Golf Club
Okayama, Japan

Mandel Brockington,
Golf Course Superintendent
Ridgewood Country Club, Waco, Texas

Gary Dempsey, Golf Course Superintendent
New South Wales Golf Club
Sydney, Australia