**New bentgrasses stir superlatives from breeders**

*By Mark Leslie*

A re the new bentgrasses coming to market this year almost too good to be true? Plant breeders who have discovered the germplasm, developed it, and nurtured it through the development process, believe so. Yet, they think even greater heights can be reached.

"I'm very excited," said Lofts Seed Director of Research Dr. Rich Hurley, whose new L-93 along with Crenshaw and Southshore bentgrass varieties all placed in the top 10 in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Turfgrass Evaluation Program (NTEP) results, released in June.

Dr. Rich Hurley of Lofts Seed said: "There is no reason to use Penncross for putting greens anymore," Engelke said flatly. "You have much better choices to work with." Dr. Joe Duich himself is excited by the improvements in the new grasses, while putting turfgrass maintenance in perspective. "Some of the best greens I've ever seen are Penncross. And some of the worst are Penncross. A lot depends on soil conditions and management." While Duich's PSU A, A1, G6 and G-2 varieties came off golf courses.

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"I continue to be real optimistic about the direction things are going," said Dr. Mitt Engelke of Texas A&M University. "The industry has got some really good choices now. Some of the new varieties are much stronger from a biological standpoint, and have stronger genetics. And I don't think that's going to stop. We will continue to add more and more physiological characteristics. We will start stacking them. We may find certain grasses that rise to the top for certain areas. They may be more niche-type grasses."

"We are starting to locate grasses with Multiple Physiological Characteristics, what I call MPCs. We want to bring together the heat tolerance, seed-production capacity, high quality, disease- and insect-resistance. We have identified the genetics for these. We are seeing this with new germplasms and genetics."

The new bentgrass cultivars, by and large, are superior in density and featuring habits more upright for a truer putting quality, said Dr. Joe Duich, who has four cultivars in the NTEP top 10 and whose Penncross, Pennlinks and Penneagle varieties have been the industry standard-bearers for 30 years.

"These newer generations of bentgrasses require different management," said Seed Research of Oregon Technical Agronomist Skip Lynch. "They are bred to be less maintenance-intensive — less water, less pesticides, less mechanical manipulation of the grass."

Once dominated by Tee-2-Green and Penn State University research, the field of bentgrass research is wider now. Seed Research's SR1020 and Providence bentgrasses "stuck a corned in the market and opened it up" in 1987, Lynch said. "Now 11 seed companies, plus two universities, are entering [NTEP]... We have 28 [bentgrass] entries just for greens. A few years back, less than a half dozen were available — creapers or otherwise."

Turf Merchants Inc. Vice President Steve Tubbs added: "The top 10 or 12 varieties didn't even exist five years ago."

"We've taken a cool-season grass and moved its areas of use 100 to 150 miles south of where it was 20 years ago," said Hurley. "If you could comfortably grow bent in the mid-section of the transition zone, now you can grow them in the southern part of the transition zone and maybe a little farther south. But you still can't grow them in Florida. The [summer] season is so long. Certainly, there are better bents for central Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi and Texas."

Engelke even points to success just north of Houston, where a golf course still reports "gorgeous" bentgrass greens four years after opening. "The bent is doing fantastically well and this is a very humid environment," Engelke said.

So what happens to the Penn series of grasses that have dominated the golf industry for years? "If somebody could see Penncross with any of the new material, I think they would be shocked," Hurley said. "There is no reason to use Penncross for putting greens. It makes no sense at all. People say they like Penncross for its aggressiveness. But all the top eight or so are more aggressive than Penncross. Penncross is prone to spike marks, it's open and coarse, it's grainy. It doesn't have as good heat tolerance as other varieties. But yet a lot of people would dispute me and challenge me."

Added Lynch: "As the newer varieties come out and show better disease resistance, why plant something you know in advance is going to cause a headache? "We won't be putting Penncross on greens anymore," Engelke said flatly. "You have much better choices to work with."

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By MARK LESLIE

Turfgrass blends. For some golf course superintendents, they are the answer to the equation as to the best turfgrass to buy.

For the superintendent looking to blend, Cato and Crenshaw equal CNC. For example, Crenshaw is susceptible to dollar spot. Cato is not. Mixing the two results in an excellent blend.

The idea is simple. Seed your favorite grass along with another that has characteristics lacking in your favored turf. For instance, Crenshaw is susceptible to dollar spot. Cato is not. Mixing the two results in an excellent blend.

I don't even sell it," said Steve Tubbs, vice president of Turf Merchants Inc. "I know there is demand that is not being met. There are possibilities exist for blends. The most probable blends are L-93, Crenshaw and Southshore. Cato has shown a tendency to thatch, he de-...