Strides continue in bent breeding

By MARK LESLIE
BELTSVILLE, Md. — Despite its minute sales in the overall turfgrass picture, bentgrass continues to be the trigger on the gun for seed company and university researchers hoping to make their name premiere among golf courses. “Only one million pounds [of seed] is sold worldwide annually, but having bentgrass expands your entire produce line,” said Kevin Morris, national director of the National Turfgrass Evaluation Program headquartered here. “You have a product to deliver quality and don’t have to depend on someone else. That helps your marketing staff.”

To that end, major bentgrass research efforts are unabated as seed companies and universities work to produce the finest putting surfaces. This year’s NTEP results show a juxtapositioning in the top bentgrass cultivars from the previous year’s test.

“Normally, you don’t see a lot of flip-flopping [in the rankings] with bentgrasses,” Morris said. “Bents can flip-flop over time if some disease comes along.

Continued on page 32

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The model 205.150 also expands your entire produce line,” said Morris. “You have a product to deliver quality and don’t have to depend on someone else. That helps your marketing staff." To that end, major bentgrass research efforts are unabated as seed companies and universities work to produce the finest putting surfaces. This year’s NTEP results show a juxtapositioning in the top bentgrass cultivars from the previous year’s test.

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Continued on page 32

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Seed companies act to maximize purity in quality control

By MARK LESLIE

Seed companies are taking measures to reduce the threat of *poa trivialis* contamination in shipments of bluegrass and bentgrass, pulling out of certain areas of central Washington, increasing the size of their seed tests, reducing seed-lot sizes and designating bagging areas as strictly bentgrass. All the action stems from reported increases in the amount of *poa trivialis* seeds in bentgrass and bluegrass seed-lot tests.

"Cross-contamination is bound to happen. These [seed farms and seed-bagging operations] aren't sterile environments," said Chuck Hutton of O.M. Scott's St. Louis office. "Seed companies are responding by requesting more stringent tests on some seeds." Seed companies have taken various actions to deal with the problem. For its part, SRO:

- Is pulling "as many acres as we can possibly remove" from the central Oregon area and moving that production to the Willamette Valley, Lynch said.
- Has its bentgrass seed tested in lot sizes of 10,000 pounds instead of the 55,000 maximum.
- Has tightened up its tests, performing a 5-gram crop and weed check on top of the 2.5-gram noxious weed search done on bentgrass and is labeling the seed as "greens quality."
- Has made gold-tag (or sod-quality) certification available as a "special-request item."
- A platinum-tag certification has been added, taking certification "to a new level."
- "All blue tag is, is a statement of genetic purity," said Lynch. "It is not a statement of seed purity. And there is a fine line there. You can certify the worst variety in the world and have it blue-tagged. It could have whatever the upper level of allowable weeds is."
- "It's like stating a Taurus is a Taurus," Hutton added. "It doesn't mean there's an engine under the hood."
- "Nobody can guarantee there will be no weeds in their seed," Hutton said. "But we are trying to give you the largest view we can [with larger gram tests]."
- "We're trying to categorize these "greens quality" seed lots as "to protect the owner, and everybody, really. The only person unprotected is the contractor, who has to pay for more." Supers as buyers

Continued from page 29

in an area never before exposed to it, or if thatch becomes a problem. "Do some have thatch problems? Yes, of course they do. Do some have disease problems? Yes. Are there going to be problems in golf course situations where they are dethatching all the time? Probably not. But people need to know there may be problems."

Also, Morris said that while most test plots across the country are maintained like a green — aerated and dethatched, "it's not like a golf course green. There's no traffic on them... Basically, we're trying to categorize these situations and determine their strengths and weaknesses."

I started using the 1-2-3™ product in mid-summer on greens, tees, and collars and have continued applying every 2 weeks at six ounces per 1,000 square feet. This winter, 1-2-3™ was the only nutrient supplement I made outside of one application of 34-0-0. The 1-2-3™ gives me much darker color without a surge of top growth, which helps me considerably with ground temperature in the desert.

During the heat of summer, the product was safe and effective. In Las Vegas we get three inches of rainfall per year and the temperature is over 100° F from May through September. Annual water bills can exceed $1 million in Las Vegas, so a product which improves water penetration and increases root growth is a big help.

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