

**BIOTECH TURFGRASSES: THE PRESENT SITUATION WITHIN THE  
INDUSTRY AND WHAT'S IN THE FUTURE**

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The commercial availability of Genetically Modified Grasses (GMG) is a matter of considerable controversy in the seed industry. This is of little surprise because the whole subject of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) is very controversial within society at large.

Genetically Modified Creeping bentgrasses could be commercially available by 2002 or 2003 if there were no controversy involved. The Round-up resistance gene has been successfully inserted into creeping bentgrass and seed stock is being increased for potential commercial production at this time. A marketing plan for Round-up resistant creeping bentgrass is nearly in place.

The Round-up resistance gene has also been inserted into Kentucky Bluegrass. This is a more difficult species to work with than bentgrass and commercialization of genetically modified Kentucky bluegrass is several years behind bentgrass.

A major concern within the seed industry is that the Round-up gene will escape into other grasses by pollen from GMGs. Grasses are wind pollinated and viable pollen can travel long distances. Studies have shown that this is a real problem and that it is likely to happen once GMGs are commercialized.

At this time, there is no consensus within the seed industry about how GMG's should be handled. The issue has become very "political" and there are few encouraging signs that this will change soon. A good example of the controversy was the well-publicized vandalism at a turfgrass research facility last summer.

In the long term, there is little doubt that GMGs will be commercially available. However, in the near term the controversy surrounding this issue will delay the commercial release of "Biotech" grasses, possibly for many years.