

Did NTEP Survive and Why Should I Care?

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The summer weather that we all dread, didn't come this year: nighttime temperatures above 75° and humidity that remains high both day and night. The general stress level on turf, including pest problems, wear, and drought, often accelerates over the end of summer and early fall.

We're certain with all of these pressures, you and just about all of your other fellow superintendents have wondered when there will be a grass that resists all of the above-mentioned problems while growing perfectly in spring, summer, and fall. Unfortunately, we not only have not found this species and/or variety, but probably never will. However, many of the advances made each year to provide better turf are due to long-term work conducted by turfgrass breeders at universities and in the seed industry and from the careful attention turf managers pay to the superior performance of selected patches of turf on their courses. Many of the advanced cultivars that we use in championship-caliber turf were selected initially by a superintendent from a challenging spot on a golf course. This material was then transformed into a named variety through continued breeding and selection. One of the steps in this process is the evaluation of potential varieties in unbiased nationally-based tests.

The National Turfgrass Evaluation Program (NTEP) — what is it? The NTEP was established in 1980 to organize and promote the uniform evaluation

of new and currently available turfgrass varieties in a systematic way. Initially, only cool season species were evaluated. Each selected species was evaluated at multiple university sites over a four- or five-year cycle. For the

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first ten years of the program, the work went on without notice and little fanfare. Recently, with a greater emphasis on using genetic resistance as a primary mechanism for increasing turf quality, cultivar evaluation has gained stature. Likewise, the NTEP program has evolved greatly.

How have NTEP activities changed? This evolution has resulted in a program that systematically evaluates both new and old cultivars of at least nine turfgrass species. For each evaluation, the initial step is to solicit the seed industry for cultivar entries. Each entered material requires a sufficient quantity of seed for all of the selected evaluation sites with a small surplus. This alone often limits the number of entries. Each entry costs the seed producer \$6,000. These funds are used to support the evaluation experiments established at universities across the country. Each university evaluator is paid \$6,000 over the course of the four-year evaluation period for each trial, generally, one per state. This support is only continued if appropriate data is collected and submitted to the NTEP. Since many of the cool season species evaluation trials have a large number of entries, sometimes over 100, there is sufficient funding for many species evaluations to be self-supporting.

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Is NTEP in financial trouble?

Earlier this summer, a notice was circulated from NTEP that the United States Department of Agriculture was removing support for the NTEP program in the 1998 fiscal year. While it might have been easy to translate this projected action into the immediate demise of the NTEP program, this was far from reality. In essence, even without USDA financial support, the NTEP operation was, and still is, fiscally sound. The lack of budgetary support on USDA's behalf, however, might have meant a lack of formal association with the USDA organization that physically houses the NTEP headquarters and its facilities. USDA did assure NTEP of a continuing relationship, allowing the NTEP headquarters to remain in their current facility. However, without a budget line, this relationship could prove to be highly unstable in the future.

The turf industry to the rescue

Fortunately, in early June, the U.S. House of Representatives reinstated the funding line for NTEP in the USDA budget. The funding was established with a 10 percent increase over the previous year's budget. This amounted to a total of \$55,000. The agricultural budget has now moved to the Senate, but additional problems are not anticipated. Final passage of the budget will be necessary to meet the new October 1 federal year.

NTEP future

The long-term continuance of NTEP was never in real jeopardy. The \$55,000 budget line in the USDA Beltsville Research Station budget represents only "support in kind" for NTEP. NTEP never did, nor never will, receive direct cash support from federal sources. The budget line only represents a continuing relationship between the United

States Department of Agriculture and NTEP allowing NTEP to conduct its business at relatively low overhead and in a nationally located area. Whether future increases or decreases occur in national funding, NTEP will continue its mission of providing a mechanism for the uniform evaluation of new turfgrass cultivars.

Where do we go from here? What is the future of NTEP and how will the industry best benefit from its services? One of the findings from a self-evaluation prompted by these recent events was the potential overlap of activities by NTEP administration. This has prompted a gradual change in operational focus and activity of NTEP over the next four to six years. Kevin Morris, the national program coordinator, who is housed at Beltsville and involved in the day-to-day operation of the organization, will slowly phase out

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his field research and evaluation activities. This will allow Kevin to focus more on administrative duties and program planning critical to NTEP's future. Dr. Robert Shearman, the current executive director of NTEP, located in Lincoln, Nebraska, will slowly move his NTEP administration activities to Kevin while increasing his local research and teaching program at the University of Nebraska. Dr. Shearman will eventually close out the position of executive director and devote full time to his activities in Nebraska. These two changes will lower the overhead costs associated with the NTEP operation assuring the ability of NTEP to continue in its evaluation of new turfgrass varieties.

NTEP will also expand the scope of its activities to help pro-

vide more realistic evaluation for selected species. With the direct cooperation of GCSAA and the USDA Green Section, NTEP will establish 15 regional evaluation trial sites on golf courses across the country. These trial sites will be newly constructed practice putting surfaces at selected host clubs. Trials will be located in the north and transition zone for creeping bentgrass greens and in the transition zone and south for Bermuda grass greens. The putting green grass evaluation trials will receive traffic similar to that found on the golf course. The experiments will be established in cooperation with a university researcher and course superintendent. Resources for conducting the experiments will be split equally between GCSAA, USGA, and NTEP. It is hoped that this program can be initiated this fall with the green construction phase. Please contact Tom

Fermanian if your club may be interested in participating. As the current north central representative to the NTEP policy committee board, Tom Fermanian will relay any requests to the development committee.

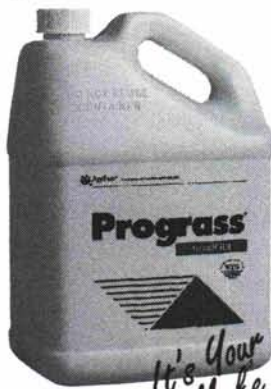
New NTEP cultivar evaluation trials

In the fall of 1995, two new Kentucky bluegrass cultivar evaluation trials were established at the University of Illinois. One trial with 103 high-maintenance Kentucky bluegrass cultivars was established at fairway mowing heights and cultural practices. A second low-maintenance study with 21 varieties was established to evaluate performance of cultivars under minimal or low maintenance. These two new trials were added to ongoing evaluations of fine fescues, perennial ryegrasses, fairway and greens-height creeping

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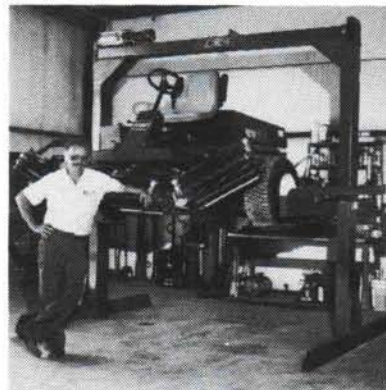
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bentgrass, and tall fescue. A new tall fescue trial is planned for fall 1996 establishment. The spring and summer of 1997 will see the establishment of both new zoysia grass and buffalo grass trials across adapted zones. Unfortunately, due to the lack of entries, a limited number of evaluation sites were supported. The University of Illinois will not have official tests for either species. It is likely, however, that we will plant an unsupported "consumer" trial with currently available varieties to support our extension efforts. The fall of 1997 will see the initiation of both fine fescue and new creeping bentgrass trials. This will provide us with an opportunity to look at new creeping bentgrass varieties under putting green management, possibly on modified root zone.

Summary

While new and expanded efforts by NTEP will translate into improved quality and performance of turfgrass cultivars, superintendents rarely evaluate these materials first hand. Often times, information of turfgrass performance under pest and environmental influences is filtered by turfgrass research and extension personnel and provided in the form of recommended cultivar lists.

These cultivars can be viewed at our annual University of Illinois Turfgrass and Landscape Field Day. All of the NTEP trials along with a vast array of field studies are clearly marked and explained during the annual morning tour. The NTEP trials are available for viewing at any time during the year. A trip to Urbana might be very useful when planning for a major renovation or new establishment. ■

the Bull Sheet

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I would again like to thank Chicago Turf & Irrigation, Illinois Lawn Equipment, Lemont Paving, and Midwest Irrigation for their help these last six years up to and during the Western Open. Knowing you have these companies ready to assist you when needed is a great advantage to have during the tournaments.

Thanks again,
Ken Lapp.

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Ken Lapp has been really busy the past couple of years preparing the course for the Western Open. In the last two years, he has built two new holes, a par 4 and a par 5, which can be used as alternate holes on either No. 2 course or No. 4 course and built a new par 3 hole as an alternate for No. 2 course, which makes it a 19-hole golf course. Last month, he started enlarging greens on holes 4 and 6 on No. 4 course and will use the alternate holes as part of

No. 4. This fall he will be enlarging the 4th green on No. 1 course and will also build a second green and tee for the 4th hole on No. 2 course. Then to top it all off, a new irrigation system is planned for the No. 3 course.

Editors note: All of you superintendents that have trouble telling your help to go the 4th tee and do something, think what it must be like at Cog Hill. "Was I suppose to go to the 4th tee on the 3rd course or was it the 3rd tee on the 4th course???"

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