

1990s the decade of the endophyte, says Lofts' Hurley

By Mark Leslie

MARTINSVILLE, N.J. — Endophytes will be the wonderchild of the 1990s, and people will use specialty grasses more often to solve specific problems, according to Dr. Richard Hurley, vice president and director of agronomy and research for Lofts Seed, Inc.

Seed researchers have made extraordinary advances in the last 20 years and "an exciting decade" lies ahead, Hurley told visitors at Lofts' 18th annual field day at its research farm here June 12.

"The '90s will be the decade of

the endophytes," Hurley said. "The '80s were the decade of tall fescues. The '70s were the decade of the ryegrasses."

Hurley said in the last 10 to 15 years, seed yield has greatly improved. He cited the increase in perennial ryegrasses as the critical factor in keeping prices in the same range as in the early 1970s.

"In the transition zone and southern part of the United States, ryegrasses are probably the most versatile and useful grass brought to market in the last 20 years," he said.

Lofts, a leading supporter of university turfgrass research for many years, is bringing four new ryegrass varieties into the marketplace in the next two years.

He said breeders have done "revolutionary work" with turf-type tall fescues, especially at Rutgers University, in making it more useful for homeowners, parks, and util-



ity sites. "A lot of people are just starting to recognize tall fescue does very well in the shade. It should be given more consideration than in the past," he said, suggesting it could be one of the "specialty grasses" that will be used for specific areas like golf course roughs.

Likewise, Hurley said some "exciting varieties" of Kentucky bluegrass are coming on the market.

"One problem," he said, "that many of the most attractive ones have is low seed production... The more reasonably priced ones have high yield in seed."

Hurley said breeders are "learning they must go more slowly in marketing low-growing, slow-growing varieties," after learning they do not establish or recover well.

"We are looking at something more moderate ... that can recover more quickly, establish more quickly..." he said.

Meanwhile, the search is on to find endophytes in bentgrasses, bluegrasses and other species.

An endophyte is a natural fungus that protects grass from sucking and chewing insects like billbugs, sod webworms, chinch bugs and aphids.

In those varieties for which an endophyte has been discovered,

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Meanwhile, Dr. Richard Cooper of the University of Massachusetts in Amherst spelled out results of pesticide runoff tests and the Cape Cod Study of ground water which reported overwhelmingly positive results for the golf course and lawn care industries.

Even under worst-case scenarios of over-fertilization and 100-year floods, runoff studies have found pesticide levels far below the hazardous figures set by the Environmental Protection Agency.

In the Cape Cod Study — on an area in Massachusetts that Cooper described as "a sponge" — "no currently registered turf-type pesticides were detected in toxologically significant concentrations."

Cooper, an associate professor of turfgrass science, said the industry is set apart from others in that "we have choices."

"If we find something that's an environmental concern, in most cases we have alternatives we can choose," he said. "When the real numbers come out (of longer-term research), we can show golf courses and home lawns are areas that benefit the environment, not wreck it."

"I still think we probably use too many pesticides, especially on golf courses where we have this obsession with perfect turf wall to wall. Yet the numbers bear out the fact we're not hurting the environment."

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