

# International market for Bermudagrass is booming

By MARK LESLIE

It may be called "hooch" in Australia and "cooch" in India, but United States seed growers call Bermudagrass a money-maker — internationally.

"There is a substantial international market for Bermudagrass seed," said Dr. Charlie Taliaferro, a plant pathologist at Oklahoma State University. "Many of the [U.S.] seed companies sell more overseas, basically because Bermudagrass is such a widely grown species there are markets for it in many, many different countries that lie essentially 40 degrees latitude north and south of the equator."

Jacklin Seed Co. research director Doug Brede said Bermudagrass sales have done particularly well overseas, where "they can't get certified sod."

And Kevin Morris, director of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Turfgrass Evaluation Program, said: "Seeded Bermudagrass is a much more attractive option overseas..."

"They can't just take a vegetative variety and let it grow. In five years it would have all sorts of weeds and other problems. Plus, it would be cost-prohibitive to transport it there."

Farmers Marketing President Royce

Richardson acknowledged that he sold the Sonesta variety of Bermudagrass to O.M. Scott which "has tremendous distribution ... and can go into areas and sell where I can't."

But he added his firm does market heavily abroad, going into areas "where people want to build a golf course and [with seeded Bermudagrass] they can put in a course for one-third the cost of sod."

"That's why we're being successful in the Pacific Rim area. We're putting in courses in Rota, Guam, Saipan... It's hard to get sod into the Pacific and keep it alive. We send them seed and they can put it down and hit golf balls off it in two months," Richardson said.

## Bermudagrass revolution

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gated Bermuda of fairway quality, Jacklin said, "All we ask for is a moderate summer, then a dry harvest time."

He added that Jacklin Seed may have a small amount of Jackpot for sale next winter, but most likely it will be late summer or early fall 1994.

### POSITIVES AND NEGATIVES

But why all the hype?

Bermudagrass is already a highly valued turfgrass for golf courses. Its vegetative types are in demand in hot, arid climates for golf course fairways and greens.

A seed-propagated variety comparable to vegetative types would be, well, a jackpot. While in all types of turfgrasses, the best vegetative types are better than the best seeded types, plant breeders are working long hours perfecting the seeded types because of the advantages of seed.

Turfgrass seed is much cheaper than sod or sprigs, and can be transported great distances and stored on the shelf for years.

Kevin Morris, director of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Turfgrass Evaluation Program, said Bermudagrass is a favorite in warm climates because it is quick to recover, hard to kill, very aggressive, and has excellent drought, wear and salt tolerance.

Vegetatively propagated Bermudagrass is fine-textured and can be mowed closer, he said.

On the other hand, Bermudagrasses are winter-tender and require higher fertility rates than some other warm-season grasses, he said.

Researchers agree with Morris' assessment that seeded Bermudagrasses "will have more and more a place on golf courses."

Baltensperger pointed out that while only three seed-propagated varieties were entered in the 1986-1991 national tests, the 1992-96 tests include six commercially available varieties (Guymon, NewMex Sahara, Sonesta, Cheyenne, Sundevil and Arizona Common), and 10 experimental types (two each from Jacklin and Oklahoma State University, one from International Seed and five from Baltensperger's program at New Mexico State).

Baltensperger told superintendents at the International Golf Course Conference and Show in January: "Even in the transition zone you'll do well to look at these [Bermudagrasses] and you will find a greater choice than even now for density, texture, fineness, shoot elongation, and so forth."

"At this point, vegetative Bermudagrasses are finer-textured," said Jacklin Seed research director Dr. Doug Brede. "All are general purpose turfs. They are ideally suited for home lawns. They are great for golf course roughs. If managed properly, they do very well on fairways. But they're not as fine-textured as Tifway 419."

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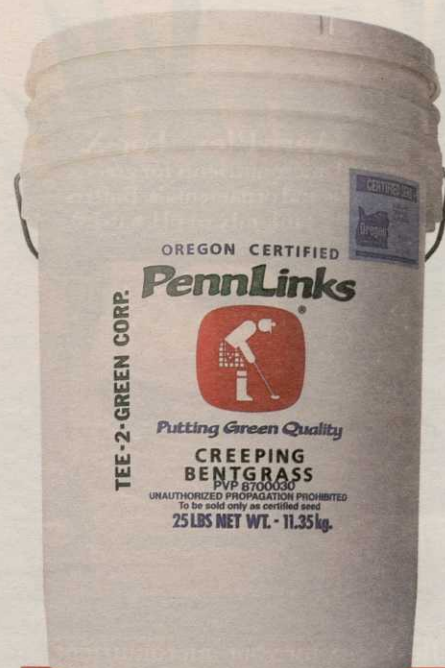
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