

Seed Supplies *Sufficient*

Turfgrass seed production is up, and prices are stable. That's good news for golf courses hit hard by the blistering summer heat.

BY RON HALL

Commercial buyers of seed should be smiling this season, particularly those who do a lot of overseeding. Production is up, supply is up and prices are stable for most seed species and varieties — particularly perennial ryegrass. Demand should remain strong, too.

Several factors affect demand for seed, including golf course construction. Weather is also a determining factor in the seed industry — for both seed production and demand, says Wayne Horman, seed marketing manager for Marysville, Ohio-based

TESTING DEBATE CONTINUES

The debate over the need for expensive independent purity testing continues. Before one Wisconsin superintendent seeded fairways this year, he turned to Marysville, Ohio-based Seed Technology Inc. for a more in-depth analysis of the creeping bentgrass seed mixture that he had purchased from an Oregon seed producer.

Despite certification tags that indicated high-quality bentgrass seed virtually free of noxious weeds, the 45-year-old seed-testing laboratory's 50-gram test revealed some *Poa annua* and *Poa trivialis*. But something else in the test results was more disturbing.

"One of the things that surprised me was that we found tall fescue, ryegrass and Kentucky bluegrass," says Matthew Levy, Seed Technology's president. The findings were somewhat odd, he says, because tall fescue and ryegrass seed are well over 10 to 20 times larger than creeping bentgrass seed



DON FARRELL/JACKLIN SEED

The Scotts Company. For instance, a severe summer drought in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic will unquestionably create greater seed demand—particularly in Maryland, Delaware, New Jersey and eastern Pennsylvania, which has suffered one its worst droughts.

Fall seed demand will be higher than usual among North Carolina golf courses that feature bentgrass greens, says Fred Yelverton, associate professor and extension specialist at North Carolina State University. Yelverton reports that bentgrass greens at North Carolina golf courses have fried in the sweltering summer heat.

"We're in the southern most range of bentgrass here, and we don't have a lot of margin for error," says Yelverton, adding that the Raleigh, N.C., area had 11 consecutive days of 100-plus-degree temperatures with high humidity and no wind — a recipe for disaster for bentgrass greens.

Off to a cool start

Weeks of 50 to 60 degrees weather this past spring and early summer in the Willamette Valley in Oregon slowed maturity of both tall fescues and, particularly, perennial ryegrass. Farms in and around the fertile Willamette, which supply much of the nation's seed, didn't begin cutting perennial ryegrass in most areas until about the third week of July. That's 10 days to two weeks later than they've cut the past decade.

"We do 50 percent of our business in the four months starting in July," says Steve Tubbs, of Tangent, Ore.-based Turf Merchants Inc. "Now we're basically compressing everything into three months, meaning we have to clean seed faster, test it faster and ship it faster."

While this puts pressure on the seed processors, it probably won't be felt by seed buyers. "Some varieties will be tight, but on the whole the Oregon crop will be ample for fall 1999 and spring 2000 needs," says Tom Stanley, marketing director for Hubbard, Ore.-based Turf-Seed Inc.

Also, there was carryover from the 1998 harvest, adds Horman, particularly with perennial ryegrass, meaning seed will remain in the pipeline until the 1999 seed is shipped. How much? Some marketers said a lot; others said "enough."

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and can be easily screened. "I doubt they (seed company executives) would have sold this seed if they had found any of these problems," Levy adds.

Seed company executives point out that such instances are rare and that for decades superintendents and other turfgrass managers have been able to rely on seed companies to stay focused on quality. Seed companies have set up sophisticated testing regimens to better distinguish contaminated lots from clean lots. Bag contents are verified by trained analysts at universities and in commercial labs.

"When it comes to growing seed and analysis, Oregon has a reputation for quality and accuracy," says Galen Troyer, Ampac Seed Co. sales manager.

But a few transient superintendents have found that certification requirements vary widely from state to state, sometimes linking the task of assessing seed quality to comparing apples and oranges. And some states don't even have certification programs.

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CULTIVAR	MARKETER	AVAILABILITY	PRICE
KEY (AVAILABILITY):			
A=expected surplus; B=adequate supply; C=limited supply.			
KEY (PRICE):			
H= higher price than last season; S= stable, equal to last season;			
L= lower prices than last season; NR = no response			
Perennial Ryegrass			
Accent	Medalist	B	S
Advent	Jacklin	B	L
Affinity	Turf Merchants	A	L
Ascend	Scotts	B	S
ASP 400	Advanta	B	S
ASP 410	Advanta	B	New
Blackhawk	Turf Merchants	A	L
Boardwalk	ABT/Olsen Fennell	B	S
Brightstar II	Turf-Seed	B	S
Caddie Shack	Medalist	B	S
Catalina	Turf-Seed	B	S
Charger II	Turf-Seed	B	S
Cutter	Pickseed West	B	S
Derby Supreme	International Seed	B	L
Dimension	Advanta	C	S
Divine	Scotts	B	L
Elegance	ABT/Olsen Fennell	B	S
Essence	International Seed	C	New
Evening Shade	Turf Merchants	B	S
Excel	ABT/Burlingham	B	S
Express	Pickseed West	B	NR
Fiesta II	Pickseed West	B	NR
Gator II	International Seed	C	New
Imagine	ABT/Lofts	B	S
Legacy II	Lesco	B	S
Line Drive	Lesco	B	S
Laredo	Turf Merchants	B	L
Majesty	Scotts	B	S
Manhattan 3	Turf Merchants	B	S
Mardi Gras	ABT/Zajac	B	S
Monterey	Jacklin	L	S
Morning Star	Pennington	B	S
Palmer III	ABT/Lofts	B	S
Panther	ABT/Zajac	B	S
Paragon	Turf Merchants	C	S
Pennant II	ABT/Burlingham	B	S
PhD	International Seed	B	L
Precision	Advanta	C	S
Prelude III	ABT/Lofts	B	S
Prizm	ABT/Zajac	B	S
Radiant	ABT/Burlingham	C	S
Rodeo II	Turf Merchants	A	L
R2	International Seed	B	L
Seville	ABT/Willamette	B	S
Seville II	ABT/Willamette	C	S
Sonata	Pennington	B	S
Shining Star	Pennington	B	S

Seed Supplies

CULTIVAR	MARKETER	AVAILABILITY PRICE	
Perennial Ryegrass (continued)			
SR 4200	Seed Research	B	S
SR 4330	Seed Research	B	S
SR 4400	Seed Research	B	S
Premier II	Barenbrug USA	C	S
Stallion Supreme	ABT/Lofts	B	L
Sunshine	Pickseed West	B	NR
Top Hat	International Seed	B	L
Wilmington	Lesco	B	S
Wind Dance	Pennington	C	S
Wind Star	Pennington	B	S
Wizard	ABT/Burlingham	B	S
Turf-Type Tall Fescue			
Adobe	Scotts	B	S
Adventure II	Turf Merchants	B	S
Amigo	Medalist	B	S
Anthem II	Turf Merchants	B	S
Apache II	Turf-Seed	B	S
Arabia	Jacklin	B	S
Arid 3	Jacklin	B	S
Avalon	ABT/Olsen Fennell	B	S
Avanti	Turf Merchants	A	L
Aztec	Scotts	B	S
Bonsai 2000	Turf Merchants	B	S
Bravo	Lesco	B	S
Coronado	Turf-Seed	B	S
Crossfire II	Pickseed West	C	S
Dixie Green	International Seed	B	L
Duster	Pennington	B	S
Empress	ABT/Lofts	B	L
Falcon II	ABT/Burlingham	B	S
Finelawn Petite	ABT/Lofts/Finelawn	B	L
Finelawn 5GL	Fine Lawn	B	L
Finelawn 88	ABT/Lofts	B	L
Gazelle	ABT/Lofts/Zajac	B	L
Houndog	International Seed	B	L
Houndog 5	International Seed	B	L
Jaguar 3	ABT/Zajac	B	S
Laramie	Lesco	C	S
Marksman	ABT/Burlingham	B	S
Micro	Turf Merchants	A	L
Millennium	Turf Merchants	C	S
Mustang II	Pickseed West	B	S
Nashville	Advanta	C	NR
Palisades	ABT/Olsen Fennell	B	S
Pride	International Seed	B	L
Rebel Jr.	ABT/Lofts	B	L
Rebel Sentry.	ABT/Lofts	C	S
Rebel III	ABT/Lofts	B	L
Regiment	Advanta	B	L
Renegade	ABT/Burlingham	B	S
Scorpion	ABT/Zajac	C	S
Shenandoah	ABT/Willamette	B	S
Shenandoah II	ABT/Willamette	C	S
Stetson	Lesco	B	S
Southern Choice	ABT/Burlingham	B	S

CULTIVAR	MARKETER	AVAILABILITY PRICE	
SR 8200	Seed Research	B	S
SR 8210	Seed Research	B	S
SR 8500	Seed Research	B	S
Sunpro	Pickseed West	B	S
TarHeel	Turf-Seed	C	H
Tulsa	Advanta	B	L
Virtue	Pennington	B	S
Wildfire	Advanta	B	New
Wyatt	Scotts	B	S
Fine Fescues			
Anvil	International Seed	B	New
Aruba creeping red	Medalist	B	New
Attila hard	Turf Merchants	B	L
Azure	ABT/Lofts	C	S
Badger creeping	Scotts	C	New
Banner III chewings	Scotts	B	S
Brigade hard	Scotts	B	S
Brittany	Lesco	B	S
Cindy red	International Seed	B	S
Dawson	Advanta	B	L
Defiant	Lesco	B	S
Discovery hard	Turf-Seed	B	H
Eco chewings	ABT/Burlingham	C	S
Eureka hard	Fine Lawn/Int'l Seed	C	S
Flyer creeping	Fine Lawn Research	B	S
Hector	Advanta	C	L
Intrigue chewings	Turf Merchants	C	S
Jamestown II	ABT/Lofts	B	S
Jasper creeping	Pickseed West	C	S
K-2 chewings	ABT/Burlingham	B	S
Longfellow chewings	International Seed	B	S
Marker	International Seed	B	S
Minotaur hard	Turf Merchants	C	H
Moxie creeping red	ABT/Olsen Fennell	B	S
MX-86AE sheep	Jacklin/Medalist	B	S
Nordic hard	ABT/Zajac	B	L
Quatro sheep	International Seed	B	L
Raymond	Advanta	B	S
Reliant II	ABT/Lofts	C	S
Rescue 911 hard	Medalist	B	S
Scaldis	Advanta	B	L
Shademark	Lesco	B	S
Shademaster II	Turf-Seed	B	H
SR 3100 hard	Seed Research	B	S
SR 3200 blue	Seed Research	B	S
SR 5100 chewings	Seed Research	B	S
Tiffany chewings	Turf-Seed	B	S
Trapeze chewings	ABT/Zajac	B	S
Vista red	ABT/Zajac	B	S
Vernon hard	ABT/Burlingham	B	L
Victory II chewings	Pickseed West	B	S
Warwick hard	Turf Merchants	B	S
Bentgrass			
Backspin	Turf Merchants	B	S
Bavaria velvet	Turf Merchants	C	H

Seed Supplies

CULTIVAR	MARKETER	AVAILABILITY	PRICE
Bentgrass (continued)			
Cato	Pickseed West	B	S
Century	ABT/Burlingham	B	S
CEO	International Seed	B	S
Cobra	International Seed	C	S
Crenshaw	ABT/Lofts	A	S
Grand Prix	Lesco	C	S
Imperial	ABT/Burlingham	C	S
L-93	ABT/Lofts	B	S
Lopez	ABT/Zajac	B	S
Mariner	Pickseed West	C	S
National	Pickseed West	C	S
Penncross	Tee-2-Green	B	S
Penneagle	Tee-2-Green	B	S
PennLinks	Tee-2-Green	B	S
Penn G-2	Lesco	B	S
Princeville	Lesco	B	S
ProCup	Scotts	A	L
Putter	Jacklin/Medalist	B	S
Southshore	ABT/Lofts	A	S
SR 1020	Seed Research	B	S
SR 1119	Seed Research	B	S
Tiger	International Seed	B	S
Tracenta	Advanta	L	H
Trueline	Turf Merchants	C	S
Viper	International Seed	B	L

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Says Tubbs, "We figured we might be able to count 20 million pounds of carryover on a 200-million-pound crop, but our crop is late this year and I'm practically out of perennial because of the carryover I've already shipped."

As sunny as this year's harvest appears, there are some clouds.

"The traditional northern turfgrass varieties of (Kentucky) bluegrass and fine fescues will be in tight supply this year," says Mike Baker, senior vice president for Pennington's Oregon division. "The market has responded accordingly to small harvests across the seed industry of Kentucky bluegrass and creeping red fescue with significant price increases in these varieties."

Ronnie Stapp, executive vice president of Pennington's seed division, blames hot, dry weather in eastern Washington for the less-than-stellar bluegrass crops. As for the creeping red fescues, Stapp says that farmers over-produced these varieties several years ago, driving down the price. Many of the farmers diverted their fields to other crops as a result, but last season there was large usage of creeping reds, therefore the shortages.

Similar market forces — but on a much larger scale — played into this year's mostly favorable seed harvest. More farmers in the Willamette Valley grew grass seed this season because of depressed prices in commodities like corn and wheat.

"Agriculture is generally in the tank," said International Seeds' Dozler. "Consequently, a number of farmers jumped into grass seed production." Dozler sees a buyer's market, particularly for varieties used in overseeding. ■

Ron Hall is managing editor of Landscape Management, Golfdom's sister publication.

Testing debate continues/Continued from page 41

In Florida, for example, where the certification program fell by the wayside, inferior quality seed prompted some turf managers to file lawsuits against seed companies after it was allegedly determined that a few Florida seed producers had sold turfgrass seed using fraudulent certification tags from Georgia, says John Mascaro, a turfgrass consultant with Coral Gables, Fla.-based Turf-Tec International.

Such stories are enough to make any superintendent wonder if the seed inside bags truly correlates with what's on the tags. Is an independent test from a third-party testing lab necessary to be certain about quality? The answer to that question varies depending on who you talk to in the industry.

It's no surprise that reputable seed companies stand by their products, as well as their production, testing and certification processes — from seed stock and field inspections to harvesting, conditioning, and on to final bagging and tagging. In fact, some seed company executives note that recent industry consolidation has been a boon for end users because an improved profit structure has allowed companies to concentrate on higher quality products, additional research and a more stable grower contracting situation.

But even many seed companies are taking a closer look at their quality assurance programs. "What some companies are doing is taking larger sample sizes and even growing the material out to ensure that it's clean," says Rick Elvey, Tee-2-Green turfgrass consultant in Hubbard, Ore.

Few people in the industry question testing labs, which operate under guidelines set by the International Seed Testing Association, the Association of Official Seed Certifying Agencies and the Association of Official Seed Analysts, among other non-profit organizations. But in recent years concerns have surfaced about the small amounts of seed being tested. At least some say larger samples should be tested to better gauge seed quality.

Levy says it was the USGA Green Section that alerted his company to potential problems about five years ago after courses that were supposedly planted with clean seed began experiencing problems. "USGA officials wanted to find out if the seed was the source," he says.

Now Seed Technology is recommending increased seed-testing amounts of about 50 grams to better uncover potential problems. But Levy admits most certification labs aren't equipped to handle the extra amounts.

"We're talking about making a pretty major jump, from 2.5 grams — about a tablespoon — to 50 grams, or about a tenth of a pound." Depending on an analyst's experience, such seed tests could require more time and expense, increasing from about one or two hours to several days and from \$50 to as much as \$500 or even \$1,000.

Says Skip Lynch, technical agronomist for Corvallis, Ore.-based Seed Research of Oregon: "If you need to be sure that the seed is clean, additional sampling can be done using larger sizes. But that costs money, and those costs will no doubt be reflected in your final price." ■