

The Never-ending Story

Poa is friend *and* foe,
depending on where you live
and what your golfers expect

BY PAT JONES, PUBLISHER/EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

In one of *Golfdom's* first issues in the late 1920s, a story appeared with the headline, "Poa Annua: Friend or Foe?" The debate continues more than 70 years later. To eradicate or to manage — that is the question.

The answer, according to the experts who gathered in April for the first Aventis "Poa Summit" at the Pinehurst Resort in Pinehurst, N.C., is both. *Poa* is a friend and a foe, depending on where you live and what your golfers expect. Here are a few key observations from the Summit, which included many of the world's leading turf experts, as well as USGA Green Section agronomists.

■ **Stan Zontek**, director of USGA's Mid-Atlantic region, noted that *Poa's* presence in North America goes back as far as the earliest European settlers. "It probably arrived in the hay and feedstocks of the holds of ships," he says.

Zontek also provided perspective on the plant's hardiness. "*Poa annua* and its biotypes are the most widely adapted species of turfgrass on the planet," he said. It's present on every continent — including a sample found in Antarctica in 1999 — and has even been shot into space as part of a shuttle experiment.

While Zontek cited the effectiveness of herbicides in the control of *Poa* in perennial ryegrass and the emergence of growth regulators for use on greens, he made it clear that no management program is perfect. "There is no silver bullet."

■ **Karl Danneberger**, turfgrass professor at The Ohio State University, confirmed

Zontek's statement about *Poa's* incredible ability to thrive. Danneberger also cited the work of University of Minnesota turfgrass professor Don White and others who believe that *Poa annua* is a "continuum" of different biotypes — not a single species — and therefore is a plant that constantly adapts and presents new management challenges.

■ **Bruce Branham**, Michigan State University turfgrass professor, said he believes growth regulators used essentially as selective herbicides present the best option for *Poa* control in the North. "Post-emergent control makes no sense unless you want dead patches," he adds.

Branham suggested that two to three fall applications of Prograss on new or newer courses offer excellent control in his part of the country. He warned to watch for persistently wet areas where some damage may occur.

■ **Several experts**, including Branham, noted that seedhead suppression tends to improve the quality of *Poa* rather than controlling or eradicating it as previously believed.

■ **Fred Yelverton**, turfgrass professor at North Carolina State University, outlined strategies for *Poa* control in the South, particularly on greens and overseeded bermudagrass fairways. "Annual bluegrass is always a weed, and it simply can't survive summers," he said.

Yelverton and Pat O'Brien, USGA's director of the Southeast Region, suggested the best way to keep dormant bermudagrass tees and fairways clean of *Poa* without risking triazine resistance is a rotation

of simazine, Ronstar and other herbicides.

■ **Mark Mahady**, turf consultant in the West, sees the other side of *Poa's* double-edged sword, where annual bluegrass is considered a highly desirable putting surface. "What are we really doing if we help a superintendent achieve 70 percent *Poa* control if it costs him his job?" Mahady said.

Mahady also believes that different strategies are required for management of different *Poa* biotypes and that the use of growth regulators for seedhead suppres-

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sion enhances uniformity and helps to select for the best biotypes. Pat Gross, director of USGA's Southwest Region, summed up his thoughts on *Poa* in the West: "Once you reach 30 percent *Poa* on greens, you might as well push it to 100 percent."

After hours of intense discussion about the burning issues surrounding *Poa annua*, Zontek summed it up best. "I just spent three days listening to the nation's best turf scientists rehashing this age-old issue, and I've concluded there's just as much art as there is science involved in *Poa* management," he said. ■

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