

# Grass Breeders' Conference Showcases O.J. Noer Facility

By Dr. Michael Casler  
Department of Agronomy, University of Wisconsin-Madison

The 35th biennial Grass Breeders' Conference was held in Madison on August 8-11 this year. Fifty grass breeders from as far away as Florida, Arizona, and Manitoba attended the meeting. The group is made up of both turfgrass and forage (or pasture) grass breeders. Although we work on different commodities, many of the ideas and principles are the same. In fact, many of the grasses are the same - bermudagrass, perennial ryegrass, and tall fescue are just a few examples for which breeders have developed both turf and forage types of varieties.

The meeting was very successful and the delegates got a good feel for Madison and the University of Wisconsin grass research facilities. An advance group arrived in Madison on Saturday and were treated to an evening on the Memorial Union Terrace overlooking Lake Mendota, followed by dinner and a walk down State Street.

On Sunday, the advance group had a golf outing at the University Ridge Golf Course. Everyone had a great time—the course was in excellent shape and the weather cooperated perfectly! Jeff Parks, superintendent of the

course, participated in the outing and was often found in deep conversation with Leah Brilman, turfgrass breeder for Seed Research of Oregon, and John Stier, UW turf management specialist, about the condition and management of the course. The teams led by Michael Casler, UW turfgrass breeder, and Milt Engelke, Texas A&M turfgrass breeder, tied for the lowest best-ball score. Team members voted to have Milt and Mike run a race to select a winner, but they declined.

We got down to the business at hand on Monday and Tuesday. Monday found the group discussing forage and pasture grass breeding research and touring plots at the Arlington Agricultural Experiment Station north of Madison.

On Tuesday, we focused on turfgrass research. Dave Huff, Penn State turfgrass breeder, gave an excellent overview of his *Poa annua* breeding and selection program. He is working to develop a perennial, greens-type *Poa annua*. We spent the afternoon at the O.J. Noer Turfgrass Research and Education Facility in Verona. The UW turf research and extension specialists gave an excellent tour and overview of activities at the facility, including the plans to expand the University Ridge Golf Course and the O.J. Noer Facility plot area. The group was able to see the center in its best condition, just one day prior to the annual WTA Turf Field Day. Many of the delegates were very impressed with the O.J. Noer Facility and the level of trial-plot activity.

There were many notable breeders who attended the conference. Milt Engelke of Texas A&M is the breeder of Cato, Crenshaw, and Imperial creeping bentgrasses. Leah

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Mike Casler, standing in the immediate foreground, hosted the Grass Breeders Conference at the Noer Facility. Here, he and his colleagues listen to Dr. Wayne Kussow discuss his research.



Brilman of Seed Research of Oregon is the breeder of SR1020 creeping bentgrass, SR7200 velvet bentgrass, and many other successful bentgrass, ryegrass, and fine fescue varieties. Bill Meyer is the new heir apparent at the "Mecca" of turfgrass breeding — Rutgers University in New Jersey. Bill had a highly successful career at Turf Seed, Inc. in Oregon, where he developed Midnight Kentucky bluegrass and many other successful turf varieties. We expect big things from Bill in the future. Mike Kenna was also here to give us an overview of future research directions and policies for the USGA Research Committee.

The meeting in Madison also allowed us to convene the Turfgrass Crop Germplasm Committee. This group provides important advice to the USDA in dealing with the collection, maintenance, and storage of all types of turf germplasm (seeds and living plants). We heard reports of recent successful collecting trips for new types of turf plants from Eastern Europe. We also discussed the need for a clonal repository for vegetatively propagated plants such as bermudagrass and zoysia.

All-in-all, it was a very successful meeting. 🌱



Gary Gaard explained the Noer Facility participation in the USGA Audubon Coop Sanctuary Program.



Dr. John Stier, likely the world's expert on *Poa supina*, leads a discussion of his research with this new golf and sport turf — Dr. Wayne Kussow's shade research is immediately behind the audience. Dr. Milt Engelke, a UW-Madison grad (M.S. and Ph.D.) is at the far right of the picture, in a white shirt and white beard. Few know that he was Dr. Doug Maxwell's grad student while studying at the Madison campus.