

TURFGRASS SEED SUPPLIES FOR 1978

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Turf seeds in the U. S. are grown in basically 3 different areas of the country - The Oregon area, the Eastern Washington/Idaho area, and the Minnesota/Dakota area. The only other major cool season turf seed producing areas in the world are the Peace River Valley in the province of Alberta, Canada and in Europe.

A. Oregon is the most diverse seed producing area in the world. There, acreages of grass seed must compete (price-wise) with wheat, hops, row crops, and mint. It all depends on how the farmer can make the most money per acre. The Willamette Valley - a valley stretching down the coast of Oregon between the Coastal and Cascade Mountains - has over 300,000 acres producing grass seeds. It is the major producing area for all ryegrass, bentgrass, fescue, and many bluegrass varieties.

The reasons why this area has become the most important seed producing area are as follows:

1. Irrigation is seldom needed because of extremely wet winters.
2. Excellent yields because of weather features and correct soil types.
3. Excellent quality of seeds due to much experience by the area growers.
4. Excellent growers who have the equipment and technical know-how to produce high quality grass seeds.

Some of the detriments to Oregon grass seed production are as follows:

1. Possible bentgrass contamination.
2. Possible Poa annua contamination.
3. Possible ryegrass contamination.
4. Many competing crops which sometimes make it difficult to grow certain varieties of seeds competitively.
5. Problems of burning acreage which at this point seem to have been solved. Although, I have just read that the city of Eugene, Oregon has filed suit seeking to overturn the new state law which permits up to 190,000 acres to be burned. We will have to wait and see the results of this suit.

B. WASHINGTON/IDAHO AREA produces many high quality bluegrass varieties. Recently, they have been involved in turf-type perennial ryegrass production. Lofts Seed is growing much acreage of our 3 new ryegrass varieties - Yorktown, Yorktown II, and Diplomat - in that area. There is ample good land with irrigation in this area and since there has never been any Poa annua or Bentgrass grown here, there isn't the contamination problems. Additionally, there have been stem rust infestations which have been a major problem in Oregon, particularly in regards to turf-type ryegrasses). With the number of ryegrasses grown new pathogens are being introduced.

One of the negative features about this area is that the winters are very severe. It is possible to suffer severe winter kill and lose an entire crop. This happens when there is not sufficient snow cover. Also, much of the area is dry land. These are farmed particularly for the common bluegrass varieties leading to erratic yields.

C. MINNESOTA/NORTH DAKOTA AREA is basically a bluegrass producing area. Park and South Dakota are common varieties produced. In the last few years, due to droughts, the area has not been a major seed producer. Not much European seed is imported to the U. S., other than Poa Trivialis. But Canada is a large seed producer, particularly for Canadian Creeping red fescue. This is produced in such a large diverse area that it is almost impossible to know how much seed is actually produced in the area. Yields vary from 10-30,000,000 annually.

The following discussion will concentrate on the availability of and pricing of the newer elite bluegrass cultivars.

Lofts Pedigreed Seed, Inc. is the national marketing agent for three proprietary bluegrass cultivars, namely - Baron, Touchdown, and Majestic. In the spring of '78 there will be no Touchdown, no Majestic, and fair supplies of Baron. Much of the Touchdown was grown on non-irrigated fields and thus the crop was lost due to the drought in Washington. This problem has been corrected and hopefully there will be adequate seed for Fall 1978. Majestic, which is all grown under irrigation in the Spokane area of Washington, suffered from the mysterious honey-comb fungus. Although it looked great in the fields, the seed yield was cut drastically. After swathing, the plants literally had to be pulled apart by hand in order to be combined. Additionally, Fylking and Glade will be in supply while Bonnieblue suffered from the same problem as Majestic and was almost wiped out. Pennstar has not disappeared from the market. There will be adequate supplies of Adelphi. Merion will be in extremely short supply and very expensive.

The real crunch for the sod growers will be for those who want to seed in June and July. For all practical purposes, we will be out of old crop (1977) seed and not have in the new crop (1978) seed.

Most seed companies attempt to build up supplies of some of the more popular grasses used by sod growers to alleviate this problem. However, it is questionable if this year's supplies will be adequate. A lot depends on the spring business.

The longer growers wait to do their actual seeding, the greater the choice of varieties will be available and probably at a better price.