

THE FORMATIVE YEARS

During 1930-1960, seed producers were highly involved with production of common grasses. They had a reliable demand for a product which they had developed an acceptable technology to handle. Basically, they collected seed from natural stands of common grasses by a practice called stripping. Seed companies would

arrange with farmers in the midwest to have certain pastures ungrazed during late spring and early summer.

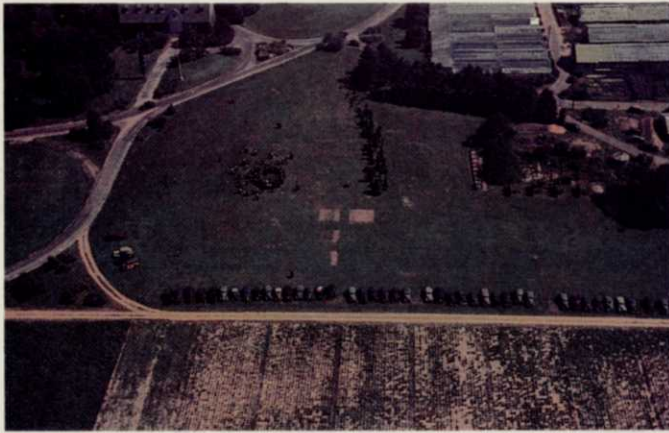
"Many millions of pounds of seed were gathered with strippers beginning in mid-June in Kentucky and the southern portion of the Western District (Missouri north to southern Canada), and following the weather

northward to finish up in Minnesota and Canada during July," says Robert Schery, Director, of the Lawn Institute.

Arden Jacklin of Jacklin Seed Company recalls, "Common Kentucky bluegrass was occasionally overproduced. When I was working for the USDA Soil Conservation Ser-



Arden Jacklin checks a seed field in 1958 in eastern Washington.



Arlington Turf Gardens prior to the construction of the Pentagon (left). **Turf plot** in front of administration building at Beltsville, MD. (right). Photos by F. V. Grau.

vice in 1936, the government bought up the excess seed and distributed it across the United States in carloads. As late as 1946, there were farmers who had picked up carloads of surplus seed in 1936 and were still trying to sell it to seed companies."

During the stripping process, green seedheads were removed, and laid out in fields to dry. Perhaps half the seed would be good after this process and germination rates were considerably lower than the 90% rate common today. Overall, production in this fashion could generate 20 million pounds of common bluegrass in a year.

Representatives of these seed companies used to meet each year to gauge production and estimate value. This group eventually became known as the Better Lawn & Turf Institute (The Lawn Institute) which now represents many turfgrasses to users.

Common bluegrass is still in demand today. Park common Kentucky bluegrass is still produced in Minnesota and the Dakotas. Of course, there are large producers of Common Kentucky bluegrass in Kentucky, the largest is Robert Dye Seed Ranch in Pomeroy, Washington. Nearly twice as much public and common bluegrass is produced annually in the United States as proprietary Kentucky bluegrass.

By far the most productive area in the U.S. today for grass seed is the Pacific Northwest, the states of Idaho, Oregon and Washington. In the mid-40's, the Jacklins and a few others promoted the improved purity of grasses grown in the Northwest and the better yields per acre allowed by temperate weather. Many offtypes of grasses existed in the Midwest because grasses had a 200 year lead on introduction there.

Modern seed production practices

evolved in the Pacific Northwest. Arden Jacklin, after leaving the Soil Conservation Service, and helping convince his father and brothers to risk part of their vegetable farming business for the turf seed industry, developed many of the current techniques of row planting of foundation seed, improved roguing the field for weeds and volunteers, windrowing the cut grass, and using combines to pick up and separate seed from the straw.

No one had any exclusive rights to the common grasses. The interest and technology to gather large quantities of seed were centered in the Midwest. As the Northwest proved to be a better area to produce turf seed and improved seed from the Northwest brought a considerably higher price, Midwestern seed companies specializing in stripping slowly faded away.

Of course, another major factor in the development and production of improved varieties was the seed company. A look at the incorporation dates of nationally known seed companies reveals these groups:

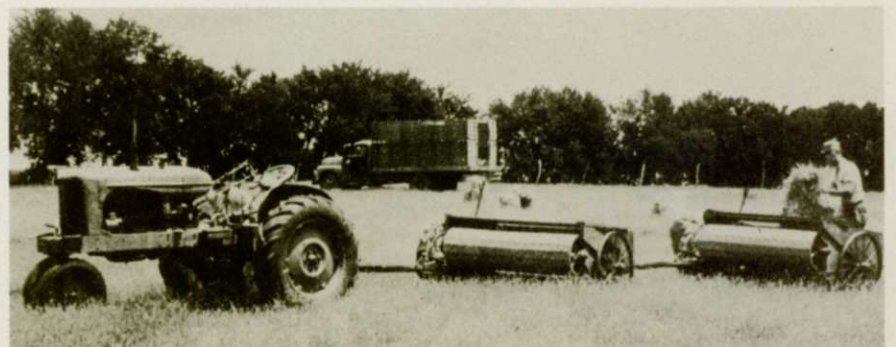
- local seed store selling garden, agricultural and grass seed to a community. Some of these include Adikes (1855), Northrup King (1884),



Green seed windrowed in curing yard in the Midwest during common bluegrass production.

Stanford (1910), Rudy Patrick (1911), O. M. Scott & Sons (1870), E. F. Burlingham (1921), and Lofts (1923).

- early recognition of new market potential for turf seed. Some of these include Jacklin (1935) and Warren's (1938).
- created due to new protection by 1970 Seed Act. Some of these include Agricultural Services (1970), International Seeds (1972), Pickseed West (1969), Turf Seed (1970). Whitney Dickinson (1972), and North American Plant Breeders (1973).



Stripping machines on midwestern field during the 50's. Photos courtesy of The Lawn Institute.