

SEED PRODUCTION AND DEMAND BALANCE IN SLUGGISH MARKET

By Bruce F. Shank, executive editor

Turfgrass seed producers have reported to *Weeds Trees & Turf* that this year's harvest was not as good as expected, but adequate to meet the demand of a market suffering from drought and a weak economy. Increased demand for cheaper, faster germinating perennial ryegrass has started to have a small effect on the consumer demand for Kentucky bluegrass, according to Bill Meyer, Turf Seed, Inc.

Sod producers, large buyers of improved turfgrass seed, have seen sales drop by 50 percent in some areas. A drop in both residential and commercial construction as well as drought conditions are blamed. Interest rates have also slowed home improvement.

The transition to improved grasses is starting to have an impact on the production of common turfgrasses. "Looks strange to see shortages of some of the common items, but it appears that acres were down this year and supply will be tight," said Larry Vetter, manager of Northrup King's Professional Turf Products Division. Vetter observes also that annual ryegrass, perennial ryegrass and creeping red fescue appear to be a little short for the coming year.

Rain at harvest time and ergot hurt production in the Northwest to a degree.

Supplies of some of the newer Kentucky bluegrasses, (such as Enmundi, Columbia and Shasta) will not meet demand. These grasses may be less proficient seed producers, haven't reached full production levels yet, or haven't had the acreage devoted to them by seed growers to meet demand. These same limitations are experienced by brokers of some of the newer perennial ryegrasses and fescues.

Shortages of common, annual and perennial ryegrasses, and red fescue appear possible this year.

Although research has taken years, many new varieties have reached the market. The broader selection is met, however, with a depressed market. Relief from drought has arrived in many locations, but interest rates remain high. Economists see little relief for high interest rates this year since businesses may have learned to live with them instead of fighting them. For the same reason, high interest rates may become less of an obstruction.

Turf Seed Harvest Report, Percentage of Anticipated Demand

Kentucky Bluegrass Varieties	% forecasted	% harvested
Adelphi	90	100
America	100	100
Aquila	75	50
A-34 (Bensun)	100	95
Banff	100	100
Baron	100	100
Birka	100	100
Bonnieblue	100	100
Bristol	100	100
Cheri	100	100
Common	100	95
Columbia	100	60
Eclipse	90	90
Enmundi	100	75
Fylking	100	100
Glade	98	100
Georgetown	Ltd.	Ltd.
Geronimo	100	100
Majestic	100	
Merion	100	100
Merit	100	100
Newport	100	100
Nugget	75	85
Parade	93	100
Park	65	75
Pennstar	100	0

Ram I	100	100
Rugby	60	75
Scenic	100	100
Shasta	100	50
Sydsport	100	100
Touchdown	85	100
Vantage	100	75
Victa	100	100
Wabash	50	40

Fescue Varieties	% forecasted	% harvested
Agrams chewings	75	100
Atlanta	100	100
Banner	100	100
Barfalla	100	100
Beaumont	10	10
Biljart	100	100
Checker chewings	100	90
Clemfine	Ltd	Ltd
Chewings	100	90
Creeping red	100	80
Dawson red	75	75
Ensylva	100	90
Falcon	40	30
Fortress	100	80
Highlight chewings	100	90
Hounddog tall	10	0
Jamestown	100	100
K-31 tall	100	100

In 1981, Jacklin Seed Company bought Jenks-White Seed Company and International Seeds, Inc., purchased the turf seed division of North American Plant Breeders. These mergers consolidate production and research data. Instead of reducing competition, these mergers might actually increase competition between the large companies. The powers in the seed business have developed lines of improved turfgrasses to compete with each other.

Whereas retail seed tended to be either high quality or common, improved varieties by growing seed companies are making inroads. For example, International Seed's Derby perennial ryegrass is rapidly gaining popularity by retail garden center customers. The retail powerhouse has been and still is O.M. Scott & Sons, which recently purchased Burpee Seed Co. to further expand its consumer line. Vaughan Jacklin, Lofts, and others are regionally strong in retail. These professional turf seed companies are offering improved varieties thereby teaching retail customers the benefits of improved grasses over common ones for fine lawns. This demand is then passed on to the sod grower and landscape contractor when customers ask for improved grasses by name.

Seed companies will moderate price increases to compete with sluggish demand this fall. However, if demand picks up dramatically, there may be spot shortages of some varieties, including common ones. Sod producers in many locations have acres unharvested. They will likely not speculate and plant large acreage this fall. Spring seeding may be a safer alternative for them at this time. This would further aggravate shortages in the spring if dramatic recovery is experienced.

Sod producers in many areas have large unharvested acreage.

As a result, this fall may not be a bad time to replenish seed inventories whether or not you intend to use it this fall.

If the market for turf improves this fall and winter, you can bet the seed companies are going to let out all stops to produce record quantities of improved varieties in 1982. **WTT**

Koket chewings	100	100
Olympic tall	Ltd	Ltd
Pennlawn	100	50
Rebel tall	10	20
Reliant hard	Ltd	Ltd
Ruby red	70	70
Scaldis hard	70	40
Shadow chewings	Ltd	Ltd
Shannon tall	Ltd	Ltd
Tournament hard	50	50
Waldina hard	Ltd	Ltd
Waldorf chewings	100	90

Ryegrass Varieties	% forecasted	% harvested
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Annual	100	90
Barry	100	100
Belle	100	40
Birdie	100	100
Blazer	80	80
Caravelle	100	100
Citation	100	80
Common perennial	100	75
Dasher	80	80
Delray	80	80
Derby	100	100
Diplomat	100	100
Elka	75	75
Fiesta	80	80
Goalie	80	90
Hunter	100	100

Jackpot	50	75
Loretta	100	100
LP-200	100	100
Manhattan	75	75
NK-200	100	100
Omega	80	80
Pennant	80	70
Pennfine	75	80
Premier	80	70
Regal	100	100
Yorktown	75	50
Yorktown II	100	100

Bentgrass Varieties	% forecasted	% harvested
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Bardot colonial	100	100
Emerald	100	100
Exeter colonial	100	75
Carmen	Ltd	Ltd
Highland	100	100
Kingstown velvet	100	75
Penncross	100	100
Penneagle	78	80

Other Turfgrasses	% forecasted	% harvested
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Fults <i>Pucinellia distans</i>	60	60
Redtop <i>Agrostis alba</i>	100	100
Reubens Canada bluegrass	100	100
Sabre <i>Poa trivialis</i>	100	60