

SEED HARVEST FORECAST

BLUEGRASS OVERSUPPLY LIKELY; RYEGRASS, FESCUE MAKE GAINS

By BRUCE F. SHANK

If the turfgrass seed harvest matches the forecasts of growers and brokers, there will be an oversupply of Kentucky bluegrasses and spot shortages of tall fescues and perennial ryegrasses.

More than 10 major seed producers participated in a survey on seed production forecasting in April. *Weeds Trees & Turf* will poll the same seedsmen in August for harvest results. Rain and disease are the most serious threats to seed production between now and August. Rain while the seed is windrowed in the fields for drying can cause major losses and lack of rain during seed formation can stunt the parent plants. Too much rain at the wrong time can encourage diseases to reduce crop yields.

Seed producers are coping with two major problems, a falloff in construction with a corresponding drop in sales of Kentucky bluegrasses and the increasing popularity of fine-leaved perennial ryegrasses and improved low-maintenance tall fescues. Balancing seed supply with demand is more complicated than it has been in the past for the growers. And it will get more difficult as turfgrasses collected from other hemispheres are brought to the U.S. for commercial production. Collection trips are taking place this year.

Kentucky bluegrasses

Poa pratensis, the backbone of the sod market and lawn installation is suffering from a drop in construction and competition from faster germinating perennial ryegrasses and lower maintenance

fescues.

Northrup King's Larry Vetter says demand for Kentucky bluegrass is down while supply is good. Rich Hurley of Lofts says, "We had a good crop last year and another good crop is anticipated for this year." Tom Stanley of Agricultural Services predicts Kentucky bluegrass is entering an oversupply situation which may take a few years to balance supply with demand. Prices may fall as a result. Touchdown is the only Kentucky bluegrass indicated which may be limited by supply.

Fescues

Fescues are the beneficiary of increased attention to maintenance requirements for turfgrasses. Fine fescues (creeping red and chewings) succeed in conditions where Kentucky bluegrasses fail, such as heavy shade and low nitrogen. They fall short on heat tolerance.

Improved tall fescues have solved the heat tolerance problem while retaining the low maintenance advantages and adding a lower moisture requirement. Transition zone turf managers have welcomed improved tall fescues.

As a result, spot shortages of tall and hard fescues are possible this fall and next spring. Seed growers have not been able to increase production of improved tall fescues to keep up with demand. The new tall fescues, such as Mustang, Rebel, Hounddog and Falcon, could be hard to find next spring.

Hard fescues, such as Waldina, Reliant, Tournament and Scaldis, are useful for shade locations with

lower maintenance required. They too could be short if their popularity continues to increase as predicted.

Ryegrasses

Once considered a less attractive turfgrass with poor mowing characteristics and light green color, perennial ryegrasses have overcome their shortcomings and are giving Kentucky bluegrass a run for its money. Seed scientists have developed darker color, better mowing characteristics and finer leaf structure in perennial ryegrasses. Add these improved characteristics to the seven-day germination period and you have a contender for Kentucky bluegrass.

Perennial ryegrass seed production is lagging slightly compared to the extremely high demand. Not as short as tall or hard fescues, perennial ryegrass prices should hold or increase. Stanley, a marketer of ryegrass, predicts, "Perennial ryegrass will overtake bluegrass if the economy improves even though it is almost twice as expensive in some cases."

Rich Hurley feels there won't be enough fine fescues to go around.

Bentgrasses

Another victim of construction, bentgrasses are selling well in the Sunbelt but poor in the North according to Larry Vetter. Demand, as a result, is average for this specialty turfgrass. Penneagle supply may not meet demand this fall and next spring, but any shortage would be minor from our data.

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TABLE 1

Anticipated Seed Production Compared To Anticipated Demand.

Turfgrass Type	Percent Demand				
	Met By	Production			
Kentucky Bluegrass Varieties					
ADELPHI	100	BILJART	100	DIPLOMAT	100
AMERICA	90	CHECKER CHEWINGS	100	ELKA	53
AQUILA	60	CLEMFINE TALL	30	FIESTA	50
A-34 (BENSUN)	92	CREEPING RED	100	GOALIE	75
BANFF	75	DAWSON RED	55	HUNTER	100
BARON	100	ENSYLVA	85	JACKPOT	100
BIRKA	100	FALCON	60	LORETTA	100
BONNIE	50	FAWN TALL	100	MANHATTAN	90
BRISTOL	100	FORTRESS	90	NK-200	100
CHERI	100	HIGHLIGHT CHEWINGS	100	OMEGA	100
COMMON	100	HOUNDOG TALL	18	PENNANT	95
ECLIPSE	100	JAMESTOWN	75	PREMIER	85
ENMUNDI	100	K-31 TALL	100	REGAL	100
FYLKING	100	KOKET CHEWINGS	100	YORKTOWN	100
GLADE	100	OLYMPIC TALL	35	YORKTOWN II	95
GEORGETOWN	5	PENNLAWN	100	MANHATTAN II	LIM
MAJESTIC	23	REBEL	35	ETON	75
MERION	100	RELIANT HARD	10	PRELUDE	100
MERIT	100	RUBY RED	60	PALMER	25
NEWPORT	100	SCALDIS HARD	80		
NUGGET	53	SHADOW CHEWINGS	100	Bentgrass Varieties	
PARADE	100	TOURNAMENT HARD	50	ASTORIA	10
PARK	100	WALDINA HARD	50	BARDOT COLONIAL	100
PENNSTAR	53	BARFALLA CHEWINGS	100	EMERALD	100
RAM I	100	AURORA	LIM	EXETER COLONIAL	190
RUGBY	75	MUSTANG TALL	10	CARMEN	100
SCENIC	100	GALWAY	0	HIGHLAND	100
SHASTA	100			KINGSTOWN VELVET	0
SYDSPORT	93	Ryegrass Varieties		PENNCROSS	100
TOUCHDOWN	75	ANNUAL	100	PENNEAGLE	88
VANTAGE	100	BARRY	85	SEASIDE	100
VICTA	100	BELLE	50		
WABASH	80	BIRDIE	100	Other	
COLUMBIA	93	BLAZER	90	FULTS PUCCINELLIA DISTANS	100
		CARAVELLE	100	REDTOP POA ALBA	100
		CITATION	90	REUBENS CANADA BLUEGRASS	100
Fescue Varieties		COMMON PERENNIAL	100	COMMON POA TRIVIALIS	100
AGRAM CHEWINGS	100	DASHER	90	SABRE POA TRIVIALIS	75
ALTA COMMON TALL	100	PENN FINE	75	BERMUDA	LIM
ATLANTA	100	DELRAY	80	STREEKER REDTOP	100
BANNER	100	DERBY	100	LIM = limited	
BEAUMONT MEADOW	0				

Other Turfgrasses

Redtop production is expected to meet demand since it is also tied to construction. Sabre *Poa trivialis* and Reubens Canada bluegrass will also meet demand. Fults *Puccinellia distans* supplies will be adequate according to Larry Vetter.

The future

You will soon be hearing about trips made by industry leaders to other hemispheres to collect new, low maintenance turfgrasses. At the same time, we have not fully explored our native grasses for fine turf uses. Seed producers must

focus on turfgrasses with commercial potential and good seed production. Any new grasses would have to undergo a good ten years of testing before being made commercially available.

Seed scientists may want to test crossbreeding native and exotic turfgrasses. The possibilities for new turfgrasses are endless. The seed market will get more complicated and less dependent on one grass type. It is an industry worth watching for new developments over the next decade.

The October issue of *Weeds Trees & Turf* will have the harvest

report which lists the precise production of each turfgrass type as compared to demands.

The results of the harvest can make a difference in pricing and availability for the fall and coming year.

We appreciate the help of Doyle Jacklin of Jacklin Seed Co., Jay Glatt of Turfseed Inc., Rich Hurley of Lofts Seed, Larry Vetter of Northrup King, Tom Stanley of Agricultural Services, Harry Stalford of International Seeds, Bob Peterson of Burlingham, and Bob Russel of J&L Adikes, and Joe Butwin of Stanford Seed.

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