

DUE SOON:

Insect-resistant bentgrasses and Kentucky blues?

Lessons from the field: don't fool with Mother Nature, and don't put all your eggs in one basket.

**BY JERRY ROCHE
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**

■ These are exciting times for the turfseed industry. But they're also times that try men's souls.

"We've been able to get endophyte infected into creeping bentgrass and Kentucky bluegrass, so we're very excited that we'll have some product in the market soon," comments Dr. Eric Nelson of Medalist America.

Endophytes are those little critters that make grasses more insect-resistant and cut down on the landscape manager's

need for costly pesticides. Until now, they've been found in perennial ryegrasses, fine fescues and tall fescues, but scientists have not been able to inject the same quality into the two most-used golf course and home lawn grasses in the U.S., to which Dr. Nelson refers.

"Endophytes are the single most beneficial and important biological turf development on the market today," says Dr. Peter Landschoot of Penn State University. "They are like an insurance



policy: you pay more, but you get less insect damage."

All news from the turfgrass seed producing industry, however, is not rosy.

Uh-oh—"Perennial ryegrass prices will be up considerably over last year," notes Dr. Jerry Pepin of Pickseed West. "The Perennial Ryegrass Bargaining Association—a growers' group—is a factor this year. But I don't know how long they will be able to keep prices up, because this is a supply-and-demand industry."

Bob Richardson of Lofts/Great Western says the ryegrass supply is down, too, creating further havoc. "Lower carryover and an average crop, plus farmers demanding higher prices and no competition from foreign sources means ryegrass price increases," he observes.

Yet ryegrass can be had—if you want to pay the price. "Perennial ryegrasses should be in adequate supply, though not yet determined," notes Zenon Lis of E. F. Burlingham & Sons.

A shadow, too, has been cast over fine fescue growers, though circumstances will probably benefit landscape managers in the long run. While stem rust disease is forcing prices of U.S.-grown fine fescues up, low-priced fescues grown in Canada are strangling the domestic market.



Nelson: endophyte-enhanced bentgrass available soon.



Stanley: look for value in fine fescues this year.

"Stem rust started affecting yields in 1993 and has become an ever-increasing production challenge," observes Lesco's Art Wick. "Fungicide applications appear to be the only solution, thus increasing production costs. This may widen the price gap between the commodity 'creeper' prices from Canada and the proprietary varieties from western Oregon."

Adds Tom Stanley of Turf-Seed: "The pricing on fine fescue is probably going to remain depressed through 1995. The Canadians have had several big, back-to-

back crops. When they have a product on the market for 35-40 cents, it's pretty tough for us to get 60-65 cents. So I think through 1995 prices will be low.

"Fine fescues are going to be an exceptional value this coming year. For a very nominal price, you're going to get some excellent, excellent products."

Back to the really bad news: if you want large amounts of tall fescue seed, you're out of luck.

"Back in 1989-90, Oregon was producing about 95,000 acres of certified turf-type tall fescue," notes Stanley. "In 1995 we will produce about 55,000 acres. The good varieties are sold out or non-existent. We will see high prices on tall fescue and some spot shortages in July, August and September."

A Wet Willie—The weather, always a topic of conversation in the Pacific Northwest's seed production areas, has supplied its share of surprises.

"Continued rain showers and cool temperatures have raised the potential for quality problems for the 1996 crop," remarks Steve Tubbs of Turf Merchants. "There has never been a long enough break in the weather for spot spraying, and the flush of growth happened too quickly to keep up with."





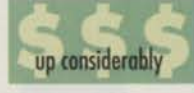




Turf Merchants estimates that 10 percent of the bluegrass crop was lost in the Pacific Northwest.

And Scott Harer of Advanta West agrees:

"The bluegrass crop looks to be light. The early-maturing grasses are coming in at less than expected. We believe that prices are at their lowest now. The only prices changing [going up] are the common and mid-range Kentucky blues; prices of the elite Kentucky bluegrasses won't change from last year."

Notes Steve Jerhoff of Finelawn Research: "The market's a little nervous because of concern about the size of the

TURFSEED OUTLOOK

	AVAILABILITY	PRICES
Kentucky Bluegrass	 adequate supply	 up slightly
Perennial Ryegrass	 adequate supply	 up considerably
Tall Fescue	 shortages	 up considerably
Fine Fescue	 surplus	 no change
Bentgrass	 adequate supply	 no change

(Kentucky bluegrass crop). If we have a year like last fall, it's going to be a tight market again."

The annual ryegrass crop, meanwhile, is "average or above," even though it's off 10-15 percent from last year—largely due to rain shatter.

Tall fescues are starting to come in with a broad range of yields, but seedhead populations are disappointing. "Late rains help tall fescue the most," notes Tubbs, "so yields would have been far worse without the last-minute help from the precipitation."

All the talk about this crop or that crop, however, might be a moot point. It's more a mixed bag that's being offered

to landscape managers.

"We now emphasize diversity," notes Dr. Landschoot. "That means planting species and blends [rather than a monostand] so a variety will dominate where it's best adapted. It's the same thing as working with an investment counselor, who will tell you not to put all your money in one company."

—Jerry Roche

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Dr. Rich Hurley of Loft's informs field day attendees of seed availability.

NEW VARIETIES:

- Barcelona Kentucky bluegrass (Barenbrug USA): one of the most aggressive bluegrasses ever developed; perfect for athletic fields and parks because of high wear tolerance; fine leaf texture, dark green color and a short growth pattern, which makes less mowing possible.
- Belmont Kentucky bluegrass

- (Lofts): available in limited quantities.
 - Confederate tall fescue blend (Turf-Seed): adds Apache II to Tomahawk and Safari; sales are growing at 20-25 percent per year.
 - Crenshaw creeping bentgrass (Lofts): introduced in 1994, but supply is now greater.
 - Endure zoysiagrass (Lesco): for

use with tall fescues in the transition zone; limited quantities available in fall.

- L-93 creeping bentgrass (Lofts): developed to perform well below a 1/8-inch cut; excellent color and disease resistance, fine texture, and good density through the summer months; available in sample quantities.

• Midway intermediate ryegrass (Lesco): for overseeding in warm-season areas where improved spring transition is needed; moderately fine textured, darker green, rapid germination, but lacks heat tolerance.

- P-105 Kentucky bluegrass (Lofts): available in limited quantities.

• Preakness Kentucky bluegrass (Lofts): available in limited quantities.

• Rebel III tall fescue (Lofts): a darker green than Rebel II, introduced last year, more readily available this year.

• Salty alkaligrass (Lofts): for sea-coasts, roadsides with salt damage or saline soil/water areas; in good supply.

• Shademark creeping red fescue (Lesco): dark green, fine textured, high endophyte with excellent density and good recuperative ability.

• Sultan seeded bermudagrass (Farmer's Marketing): fairway-quality; one of highest ranking seeded entries in NTEP trials; developed by Dr. Arden Baltensperger, New Mexico State University.

• SunStar bermudagrass (Lesco): cold tolerant, fine leaf texture, more decumbent growth than common; seed for evaluation available this fall.

• Wildwood Kentucky bluegrass (Lesco): introduced in 1994, but supply is now greater.

• Williamsburg perennial rye (Lesco): dark green color, fine texture, excellent mowing characteristics, moderate endophyte level and high seed yield; primarily for winter overseeding in warm-season areas.

• Yuma seeded bermudagrass (Pennington): drought tolerant, low growing, excellent turf density, rich green color; quick germination and rapid recovery from mechanical injury; less water required after establishment.

(NOTE: List is not all-inclusive. These are companies that responded to an LM survey by deadline.)

—J.R.



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