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What happened to the traffic trial?

EARLIER THIS YEAR a 3-year, National Turfgrass Evaluation Program (NTEP) research trial on drought and traffic tolerances of cool season turfgrass was cancelled due to lack of number of entries to have a viable trial, which is 20. They only received six total from two companies.

I exchanged emails on the topic with Kevin Morris, NTEP's executive director; his organization has been coordinating evaluation trials and publishing objective data on turfgrass performance since 1981.

Why do you think this proposed study didn't attract more entries?

"I believe the economy and the state of the seed industry, at present, were the two biggest factors. The seed industry has traditionally experienced down cycles, which typically happens every 7-10 years. They are in the midst of a down cycle right now, with high seed inventory that has been difficult to sell due to the economy.

"Unfortunately for us, the down cycle and the economy's decline happened at virtually the same time. I received many comments from companies that they liked the idea of more specialized testing, like the traffic and drought trials we proposed for 2009. The drought trial was established, but it consisted of only 17 paid entries, which meant we had to reduce the number of trial sites. This was not an option with the traffic trial, as we only received six paid entries. In my conversations with seed companies and breeders, they believe that this trial would have attracted enough entries if the timing would have been different."

Is there an option to purchase seeds and do the trial without full cooperation from seed companies?

"Conducting a trial without any funding from seed companies (who sponsor the trial by paying entry fees) means we would need other funding sources. STMA committed an amount equivalent to the funding for one trial location, which was very helpful, but we needed seed company support to fund other locations, as well as pay for the trial administrative costs (organizing the trial, analyzing and publishing the data, etc.)."

What are the next steps being taken to try and resurrect this study?

"We have not decided how to move forward as of yet. The next 6-12 months are a critical time for the seed companies as there may be some attrition in the industry. I believe we will have to wait until after the economy and the seed industry rebounds to see when we reschedule this trial. I think there is enough interest in this trial for it to be resurrected sometime in the future."

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