

State of Seed Supply Report

Editor's note: We asked principals from seed companies across the country to answer two questions: What is the state of the supply of your grass seed crop used for sports fields heading into the overseeding and heavy-use football seasons? And, what is the state of supply for sports turf looking like for Spring 2012 growing season? Here are the responses we received:

WE ALL KNEW the pendulum would swing from overages to shortages; it was just a matter of time. That time has come. Seed companies and growers have suffered losses on crops. Due to weak demand and state of the economy, grass seed production fields were plowed. Today inventories are cleaned up. Trying to get seed acres back into production is difficult because there is strong commodity competition from other crops. There are and will be severe shortages in the grass seed market even though consumption is expected to remain relatively flat due to a lagging global economy.—Chris Claypool, General Manager, Jacklin Seed by Simplot

Oregon grass seed farmers can finally take advantage of warm temperatures and dry skies as summer has arrived late. The workday is nearly round the clock as the crop is generally ready for harvest.



The crop is about 3 weeks late as the cool, wet spring combined with the wet weather in July pushed back harvest. It is the latest harvest in my 25 years of grass seed sales. The first fields have been all over the board, but what we are seeing has been normal yields in turf grass crops. The seed industry's inventories have been re-balancing the past couple of years. 2009 and 2010 carryover seed has been flushed out of the system by now. Today, we are dealing with spot shortages in distributor warehouses as we move forward with cleaning all turf crops. A light crop may cause some shortages in some varieties. Cool season turf grass prices at farm gate have gone up anywhere from 10 to 25% based on the species. New crop tall fescues are just starting to ship, while perennial ryegrass is a bottleneck to ship awaiting cleaning and testing in August for certified Blue Tag seed.

Just a few years ago, grass seed had the second highest production value among all agricultural commodities in Oregon. But very few crops have dropped in value the past 6 years as much as grass seed. Its value has declined nearly 50 percent since 2008, from a high of \$510 million that year to just \$256 million last year. Like the nursery industry, Oregon's top ranked commodity, the recession and the corresponding housing market slump have reduced demand and sales. A surplus of grass seed has also led to a big reduction in acreage planted. In 2008, the number of acres planted in fescue in Oregon was about 195,000. Last year, that dropped to about 136,000 acres. Also in 2008, more than 226,000 acres were planted in ryegrass. Last year, plantings were down to 203,000 acres. During that stretch, many Willamette Valley growers replaced grass seed crops with wheat. Total acreage in grass seed crops is down again this year. Since its peak in 2005, acreage has dropped about 30%. (Statistics above referenced from the Oregon Department of Agriculture.)

We are experiencing heavy demand for all cool season species. Supply is good for fall 2011, and there may be spot shortages of high NTEP ranking varieties in mid spring 2012.—Zenon Lis, Burlingham Seeds

Much of the carryover of seed from previous years has been used up. Production acres for 2011 crop of Tall fescue, Perennial ryegrass, and Kentucky bluegrass are reduced from previous years, so there will be less overall supply in fall 2011. Supply of some of the best varieties will be limited until fall 2012 crop arrives. It will be important for sports turf managers to plan ahead and possibly buy early to get the top-rated varieties they require to deliver the best turfgrass stands.—Murray Wingate, Turfgrass Marketing Manager, Lebanon Turf Products

Supplies are looking very bright for sports turf grasses from Barenbrug USA. We are producing a generous supply of seed for our distribution partners that supply the sports turf industry.

RPR, Regenerating Perennial Ryegrass, named a 2011 Innovative Product by the STMA, has been very successful for sports turf managers. This fall a new variety will be added to the *Lolium perenne stoloniferum* stable. The new variety is called Bargamma and, as with Baralpha and Barbeta, is has been intensively tested for wear tolerance. Supply for RPR looks very good.

Turf Blue Kentucky bluegrass performed well in recent NTEP trials and the supply looks very good.

SOS Cool season is our overseeding brand containing Turf type annual ryegrass, which is becoming more popular for overseeding. Dr. Minner at Iowa State University did a very good study with annual ryegrasses for overseeding during the season. In this study he overseeded and

The seed industry went through some rough years with supplies being high and the economy in recession, but as it always happens, production is reduced, supplies are sold and become tight again. This is a 7-10 year cyclical event in the grass seed industry.

—Kevin Morris, executive director of the National Turfgrass Federation

kept the wear on the plots. In the spring SOS will transition on its own. There is good supply on turf type annual ryegrass.

We supply the world's only rhizomatous tall fescues, which have the ability to repair themselves after wear and tear. Turf Saver RTF supplies also looks very good.

More and more grasses are coated with our coating technology called Yellow Jacket. Yellow Jacket contains ZEBA that holds 600 times its own weight in water. It also contains Apron to protect the seedling from Pythium. Supply on Yellow Jacket looks very good and is available on all grasses from Barenbrug.-Christiaan Arends, Barenbrug USA

There are ample supplies of SeaDwarf Seashore Paspalum and Aloha Seashore Paspalum sprigs and sod at licensed sod producing farms in strategic locations around the US and around the globe. UltimateFlora Zoysia, a medium textured zoysia developed by the University of Florida, is readily available as sod in the Southeast.-Dr. Lee Berndt, Vice President of Research and Development, Environmental Turf Celebration bermudagrass is currently

available in stable supply with certified acreages spread throughout the southern US. Shortages may occur late next spring as peak demand for Celebration occurs not only in sports turf applications during this time period, but also in golf usage. Latitude 36 and NorthBridge bermuda are two very promising grasses coming out of the Oklahoma State research and development program. Seven turf producers in the transition zone have planted both grasses with much anticipation. Both varieties are expected to be used north and south of the transition zone. Availability will be limited for 2012.

Bella bluegrass is currently available in limited supply in certain parts of the country. Bella is the world's first dwarf bluegrass that is propagated vegetatively meaning it is propagated with sprigs (not seeded) and installed only as sod. Left unmowed, it only grows to about 4 inches in height. Bella's availability will be limited to Utah, Idaho, Wyoming, Colorado and parts of Canada in 2012.-Tobey Wagner, President, Sod Solutions

Washington II bluegrass seed will be extremely limited and should sell out this fall. An-

other bluegrass, Concerto, a shamrock-type, has readily available seed supplies now but supplies could tighten up come spring 2012.

LS 1200 tall fescue, a semi-dwarf variety, has extremely tight supplies and should sell out this fall. Another bluegrass, Ultimate, another semi-dwarf variety, has seed available but supplies could be short come spring 2012.

Perennial ryegrasses LS 2300, LS 2200, LS 2100 and LS 2000 will have supplies continue to tighten up as we move through fall 2011. If movement is good then expect supplies to be tight come spring 2012.

Over the past 3 years we have reduced acres so that inventory comes more in line with demand. At some point those two lines cross to where inventory and new crop may not be enough to meet demand. We are seeing the correction arriving sooner than expected. Expect supplies to remain tight and prices strong at least through 2012.-Brad Dozler, Lewis Seed Co. ■

Correction

In the traffic testing results from NTEP article in the August issue, the Kentucky bluegrass table on page 10 has an error. It refers to "LS 4000" but the actual name is "Washington II." We apologize for this mistake.

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