

» **ROMMEL FERNANDEZ** National Soccer Stadium in Panama grassed with SeaDwarf seashore paspalum.

## Update on turfgrass varieties for 2011

**Editor's note:** *We asked some turfgrass seed experts for comments on the 2011 crop of varieties for sports turf use, specifically what will be available next spring and whether prices will be up or down.*

### TIFSPORT

The bermudagrass picture for the University of Georgia's two mainstay varieties reflects the somewhat down economy. Plentiful supply of TifSport and Tifway 419 with suppressed demand and thus lower prices. That should be good news for sports turf managers looking to renovate or for new installations. You can expect excellent quality Tifway 419 from certified producers in all of the warm season states and certified TifSport will continue to be popular for its improved cold tolerance, dark green color and ability to handle heavy overseeding.

UGA's new TifGrand bermudagrass was developed by world-renowned turfgrass breeder Dr. Wayne Hanna and was released in limited quantities in 2010. TifGrand, which should be available in good supply in most markets for the 2011 season, is the world's first seed and pollen sterile (triploid hybrid) bermudagrass and thrives in up to 60% shade. With the modern trend to build ever more vertical stadiums to gain additional seating, shade issues on sports fields have become increasingly problematic. This new certified shade tolerant bermudagrass was developed to overcome traditional bermuda-

grass shade problems on sports fields. TifGrand also has naturally dark green blades, tawny-mole cricket non-preference and significantly lower nitrogen and water requirements. Currently there are licensed TifGrand producers in NC, SC, GA, FL, AL, TX, AZ, and HA.-Brian Schwartz

### PENNINGTON SEED

We at Pennington Seed will not be releasing new cool season or warm season cultivars this spring though we do have a few in the pipeline for release in the fall of 2011 and spring 2012.

The production of perennial ryegrass has continued to decrease in Oregon production due to a few factors, i.e. the decrease in demand, the carry over of high cost seed from years past, and the current wheat prices. Wheat is a nice rotation crop for the farmers as it allows them to clean the field of grasses. Some farmers are continuing for the second year of wheat vs. the standard one year rotation due to low rye grass prices and adequate wheat prices.

Prices will remain low through the fall and possibly the spring of 2011 though many feel that fall of 2011 will see a price

### West Coast Turf

West Coast Turf is introducing Platinum TE in 2011, a Seashore Paspalum variety, says sales manager John Marman, who adds that "Costs are stagnant; they will remain the same in 2011."

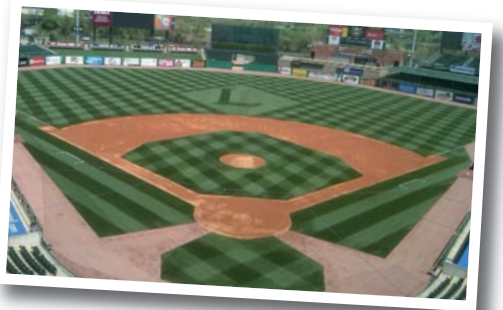
increase due to the smaller inventories and production.

The inventory of improved Bermuda cultivars is better than years past though production cost have increased. We will continue to hold our pricing stable despite the increased cost. Common bermuda prices will likely increase as the spring progresses and supplies dwindle.-Russ Nicholson

### ENVIRONMENTAL TURF, INC.

More and more professional stadiums as well as municipalities in warm-season turf zones are using seashore paspalum for their sports fields. Aloha seashore paspalum and SeaDwarf seashore paspalum are grown as sod or sprigs. The grasses are produced by licensed sod farms through Environmental Turf's network of licensed growers.

Aloha seashore paspalum was developed by breeders at the University of Florida. Aloha has a very vigorous growth rate that makes it heal



» **LOUISVILLE SLUGGER FIELD** featuring Turf Blue, a fast-germinating Kentucky bluegrass. Award-winning groundskeeper Tom Nielsen says, "The color is really good and looks awesome from the stands. Considering how hot it's been the grass is doing amazingly well. The wear tolerance has been very good too. Good early spring green up as well' it was green by March 27."

quickly from sports-related wear. Aloha is available through licensed producers in Florida (Emerald Island Turf in Avon Park) and California (Am-Sod in Escondido).

SeaDwarf seashore paspalum is the only true dwarf variety of seashore paspalum. It has a fine texture, distinctive bright green color and its strong root system creates a cushiony feel underfoot for better play. SeaDwarf is available domestically through licensed producers in California, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, and Hawaii. International licensed producers of SeaDwarf are located in Australia, Brazil, China, Mexico, Panama, South Africa and Turkey.

Both Aloha seashore paspalum and SeaDwarf seashore paspalum may be irrigated with alternative water sources such as effluent or brackish water. The grasses' salt tolerance allows ordinary table salt or salt brine solutions to be used instead of herbicides to kill weeds. Plus, both have lower nitrogen requirements and lower overall water requirements than bermudagrass varieties.

Rex Cunningham, farm manager at Emerald Island Turf, said he expected prices on SeaDwarf and Aloha to hold steady in Spring 2011.-Stacie Zinn

## LEBANON TURF PRODUCTS

In general, seed prices for most species should be fairly stable going into 2011 compared to 2010. However, the downturn in the economy, which goes back as far as 2007, and the subsequent decrease in demand have had a profound effect on the seed business

Starting in 2008-09, prices dropped to historic lows on some seed varieties. In some cases, the prices were below the cost of production. As a consequence, a lot of seed production acres have been removed over the past 2 years and replanted to wheat or other crops. The price of wheat really took a jump again in August due to problems in large wheat growing areas like Russia. So, even more seed production acres may be replaced this fall.

Prices have remained low as inventories are reduced. There should be adequate supplies of most species through spring 2011, but as demand starts to return, shortages of some varieties and species may start to occur. That could start to drive higher prices later in 2011.-Murray Wingate

## BARENBRUG USA

I think pricing compared to last year is fairly stable for most species. There is pretty good movement in the seed industry right now so I don't see a reason for prices to go down. Actually over the run of 2011 prices on perennial ryegrass are probably going up, most likely in the fall.

Our introduction of RPR (Regenerating Perennial Ryegrass) into the US market has been a tremendous success with many happy users. At the end of the spring we were sold out and we had had a large amount of RPR produced. Now in the fall we see people re-ordering the RPR seed, which says the product is performing. The initial trial plots at Ohio State were still in the ground this summer but weren't irrigated and fertilized. With a very hot summer in Columbus, all the regular perennial ryegrass plots were dead except the RPR.

SOS stands for Super Over Seeding and is our system for overseeding warm-season grasses. We believe that in a few years the market

will shift from perennial ryegrass to turf type annual ryegrass for overseeding warm-season grasses in the south. The new lines of annual ryegrass are not any different compared to perennial ryegrass. New turf type annual ryegrasses are going in the ground this fall for production. SOS was used on 32 training fields for the World Cup in South Africa and was flown in during the tournament as the stadium fields that were overseeded with perennial weren't holding up.

SOS is also used more and more for overseeding of cool-season grasses sports fields in the north. Dr. Dave Minner at Iowa State found that when you overseed during the season turf type annual ryegrass gives the best result. Dr. Minner tried this both in fall and spring overseedings and found the same results. Tony Leonard from the Philadelphia Eagles has used SOS Cool Season for years on his stadium field, and says sometimes he is mowing grass in a few days after overseeding.

Turf Saver RTF has the patented RTF technology inside. RTF stands for

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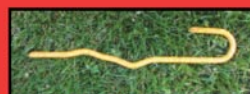
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# Global economy

By Murray Wingate

Leaders in the grass seed industry gathered earlier this fall for two of their industry's most important events. At both the Atlantic Seed Association conference in Philadelphia and later at the Western Seed Association meeting in Kansas City, attendees were reminded that we live in an interconnected world where a hiccup in one part of the globe is acknowledged in another and felt in the pocketbooks at athletic complexes, golf courses and landscape companies throughout the US.

To understand the current state of the grass seed market, you must first recognize that the grasses that cover our sports fields and parks grow on some of the same acres where wheat, corn and barley are also cultivated. That puts them in direct competition with the grains that ends up in the food we eat, that cattle graze on and the biofuels being produced to counter rising fossil fuel prices.

With that in mind, let's go back a couple of years to a time when grain prices were on the rise and seed companies were forced to increase payments to growers if they wanted their crops planted. Soon after the economy slipped into the ditch, new housing construction slowed to a crawl and weather conditions improved, meaning little or no turf was lost. It was a perfect storm that lowered demand dramatically for perennial ryegrass, tall fescue and bluegrass seed. Sports fields, golf courses and homeowners that normally would have overseeded decided they didn't have to, even if they could have afforded to.

Fast forward to today. Seed production acres are at their lowest levels in years. Corn and wheat prices continue to rise. Farmers are increasing production of grains they can sell for a profit.

Couple all that with our recent summer of discontent, when heat and drought parched turf across the country. The record-setting conditions left turf so ravaged in many areas that *not* overseeding wasn't an option this fall. Sports field managers, superintendents and homeowners were forced to buy and plant seed, whether they wanted to or not.

What does all this mean for the price you'll have to pay for grass seed next year?

With current prices at or near historic lows, we see increased demand for agricultural grains and continued demand for overseeding in the spring. And if the demand we've seen this fall continues, we could see a turnaround in market prices. But, like the weather, the seed market is tricky to predict.

If there's a lesson in this scenario, especially as the budgeting season hits, it's that manufacturers and distributors need to work with their customers to help plan their spring and fall seed purchases. Waiting until they need seed to put in the ground, as many did this year, may not be a sound strategy for 2011. ■

*Murray Wingate is turfgrass sales and marketing manager for LebanonTurf.*

Rhizomatous Tall Fescue and is the only one in the market. We just released a new variety called BAR FA 7676; this is the newest variety with the rhizomatous technology. We are not releasing these varieties very often as the breeding technology is very difficult, and it takes sometimes 10 years to develop a variety. Turf Saver RTF is one of the most drought tolerant cool season varieties. New Mexico State University did a large research study on drought tolerance under 15 and 30 % less water than evapotranspiration. In both cases Turf Saver RTF was the best in the trial. Better than other regular tall fescues, hybrid Texas bluegrasses etc.

Turf Blue. We are having a lot of success with fast germinating Kentucky bluegrasses. They give the sports turf manager a chance to get bluegrass established in a short time window. Pam Sherratt at Ohio State did a study on the establishment of our Kentucky Bluegrasses in Columbus. She reported that she could get Kentucky bluegrass established and ready to play in 6 weeks. Troy Smith at the Denver Broncos is using Barimpala, one of our fast establishing varieties already for years and loves it.-Christiaan Arends

## SOD SOLUTIONS

Started in the early 1990's, Sod Solutions is a turfgrass research, development, and marketing company that has developed grasses that are drought tolerant, require less mowing, require less overall inputs, and are more durable for sports.

Sod Solutions works with more than 200 farms worldwide to produce and distribute turfgrass. The company is not locked into just one source of improved turf material but works with several entities to find the best grasses from around the world. Sod Solutions does not grow or produce grass for commercial sale but does work with private breeders, develops grasses in-house, and works with several university research programs to identify and develop the best varieties available for the industry.

A number of grasses released by Sod Solutions have had a significant impact on the sports turf industry including Celebration bermudagrass and EMPIRE Turf zoysiagrass. Celebration has expanded the capabilities of bermudagrasses with regard to wear, durabili-

ty, recovery, drought, shade, and overall performance.

Bella Bluegrass is the first and only dwarf variety of bluegrass that is propagated vegetatively. It grows and spreads from rhizomes, which allows for quick repair from damage. Bella has a dark, alpine-green color and is drought and heat tolerant. Bella only grows to about 4 inches in height which means less mowing.

EMPIRE Turf is a wide-bladed zoysia that has an emerald-green color and is extremely tough. EMPIRE is a top choice for parks as it is wear resistant and low maintenance. This year growers in Florida were caught off guard as the demand was very high throughout the spring, and even in a down economy, many regions ran out of EMPIRE for varying periods. It is uniquely adapted to the heat and humidity of the southern US and performs well on a wide variety of soils, which is not typical of most zoysiagrasses.

For 2011 Sod Solutions will release a fine-bladed grass called Geo Zoysia that is an emerald-green, fine-textured zoysiagrass with outstanding shade tolerance and adaptability to a wide range of climates and soils. In golf, Geo will be an excellent choice for tee boxes, surrounds, and fairways; Geo was developed by a turf producer and has proven to be an extremely tough grass.

Availability of Celebration and EMPIRE will be moderate to good for next spring. Growers are increasing acreage to keep up with demand, and the outlook is good for production from spring to summer 2011. Bella Bluegrass will be available next spring in the Wyoming, Utah, and Idaho with limited quantities elsewhere. Acreage of Geo Zoysia and Regenerating Perennial Ryegrass will be available in limited quantities across the country next spring.

Pricing for all grasses will be stable to increasing. Supply is getting more in-line with demand and prices should be increasing throughout next spring followed by normal summer stabilization. Turf is like anything else, you generally get what you pay for. Be prepared to pay a fair price for high quality turf or be prepared to suffer consequences that will most likely cost more in the long run if you purchase on price alone.-Tobey Wagner ■