



This semi-annual newsletter is published by the USDA-NRCS Brooksville Plant Materials Center, 14119 Broad Street, Brooksville, FL 34601-4525, Tel: 352-796-9600, FAX: 352-799-7305.

## PMC Distributes Biofuel Planting Material

By Mimi Williams

Increased fuel prices and concerns with rising CO<sub>2</sub> levels have been instrumental in a nationwide push to commercialize fiber-based biofuels production. Everyone has probably heard of switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum*), a warm season native grass, that can produce up to 12 tons of dry matter in many areas of the country. In fact, the Brooksville PMC is currently collaborating with University Florida and a Rutgers University visiting professor in a project evaluating switchgrass biomass production on muck soils in Belle Glade, FL.

Being a subtropical state though, producers in Florida have the opportunity to use some tropical grasses that cannot be grown in other areas of the country. Extensive work in the late 70's and 80's showed that lines of elephantgrass (*Pennisetum purpureum*) can produce as much as 20 to 40 tons of dry matter in a year. The PMC has maintained several lines of elephantgrass since the 60's, when their primary use was for windbreak material. One accession in particular, PI 300086, was distributed for windbreak plantings in South Florida vegetable fields. In fact this year, Greg Hendricks, Florida State Resource Conservationist, was asked by Mr. Flint Johns of Lykes Brothers, Inc., to help identify a tall grass that was growing on some of Lykes property in Manatee County. Greg recognized the material was elephantgrass, and PMC records indicated PI 300086 had been distributed to Lykes Brothers. DNA analysis of the material confirmed that it was PI 300086.

This identification was important because elephantgrass is listed on the Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council Cat. 1 list. One accession in particular, Merkeron, produces fertile seed and is thought to account for most of the plant's spread in South Florida. In contrast, PI 300086 doesn't flower at the latitude of the PMC and is thought to not flower even further south in the state. So when Lykes Brothers, which in 2007 was awarded the first biomass production permit issued by the state of Florida, requested planting material of PI 300086, the PMC was happy to coordinate distribution this Novem-

ber of about 40,000 planting pieces, enough for 5 acres. We'll keep you posted on this planting as well as the switchgrass project in Belle Glade in later newsletters.



## Rangeland Plant ID and Seed Technology Workshop

By Janet Grabowski

On November 5 and 6, the PMC partnered with the Florida Chapter of the Society of Range Management (SRM) to offer a 1-1/2 day workshop to SRM members and others in the conservation community that wanted more information on plants endemic to Florida's rangeland. The workshop kicked off at 12:30 on the first day with introductions and a presentation on Florida's ecological communities and important rangeland plants given by Greg Hendricks. A presentation on introductory taxonomy and grass terminology by PMC Manager Janet Grabowski followed and included our own version of a Jeopardy quiz to reinforce definitions of the terms that had been presented. Rounding out the day was a presentation on rangeland restoration techniques by Mimi Williams, Florida's Plant Materials Specialist. Since this "classroom" portion of the workshop was

held in the conference room at the PMC, space was limited (below). The enrollment cap was supposed to be 25,



however, due to the level of interest, we stretched it to 29 and attendees were also treated to a lesson in togetherness.

Thursday's session was the hands-on training portion of the workshop. Since we were not restricted to the classroom, we could accommodate more people and 36 enrolled. The group was split into thirds and each subgroup rotated through the three concurrent training sessions. The native plant ID training took place at the nearby Withlacoochee State Forest Headquarters Tract and was led by Greg, assisted by PMC volunteer Pat Leach. Another session, led by Janet and Mimi, was held in the PMC seed processing building and introduced the students to equipment and techniques used to thresh, clean, and condition seed for planting (below). The third session was held in one of the PMC fields and PMC Biological Science Technicians Mary Anne Gonter

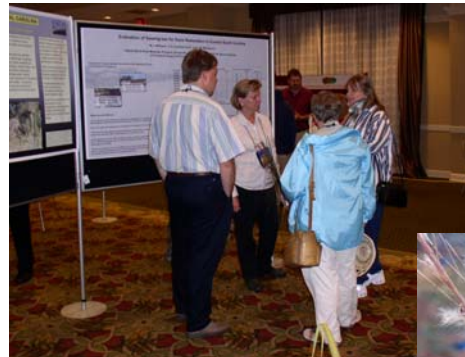


and Ed Black introduced students to equipment used to harvest and plant native seeds.

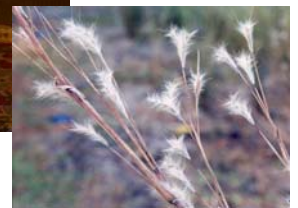
The current national president of SRM, Allen Rasmussen (above, left) came from Texas to attend the workshop. He works closely with the Kika de la Garza PMC in Kingsville on native seed production projects and indicated that he felt the training provided during this workshop was quite valuable. The Society provided lunch for the attendees on Thursday and the members held their business meeting after the workshop adjourned at 3:00 that afternoon.

## Eastern Native Grass Symposium

The Sixth Eastern Native Grass Symposium was held in Columbia, SC on October 7-9, 2008. This symposium is held every other year and is an ideal opportunity for those individuals working with native species in this part of the country to get together and exchange information. This year, Mimi Williams, Janet Grabowski, and Mary Anne Gonter attended the symposium, pictured below with John Englert (far left), who was recently named the National PM Program Leader. Mimi



presented a poster on the work the PMC is doing with Clemson University to restore



sweetgrass (*Muhlenbergia capillaris* var. *filipes*) on the dunes in South Carolina. Janet gave an oral presentation on Ft. Cooper Germplasm splitbeard bluestem (*Andropogon ternarius*) the newest PMC plant release (above, right).

## Plant Materials Available

Seeds and/or plants of the following PMC releases are available for production purposes and can be requested from Mimi Williams at [mj.williams@fl.usda.gov](mailto:mj.williams@fl.usda.gov) or (352) 338-9544. These plants were selected to meet conservation needs and are recommended by USDA, NRCS for planting throughout the Florida PMC service area. Contact the PMC for additional information at (352) 796-9600.

- ◆ Floral Passion blazing star
- ◆ Miami, Stuart, and Wabasso switchgrass
- ◆ 'Flora Sun' beach sunflower
- ◆ 'Northpa' and 'Southpa' bitter panicum
- ◆ 'Sharp' and 'Flageo' marshhay cordgrass
- ◆ Morning Mist hairawn muhly
- ◆ Gator blue maidencane
- ◆ Citrus maidencane
- ◆ 'Florigraze' and 'Arbrook' perennial peanut
- ◆ 'Chapingo' Mexican teosinte
- ◆ Martin and St. Lucie eastern gamagrass
- ◆ Brooksville 67 and Brooksville 68 perennial peanut
- ◆ Ghost Rider purple bluestem
- ◆ Ft. Cooper splitbeard bluestem

Look up the Brooksville, FL PMC at <http://plant-materials.nrcs.usda.gov> or <http://www.fl.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/flplantmaterials.html>

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