

PLANT MATERIALS MIDSOUTH

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Change Is In the Air!

by: Joel Douglas

The first quarter of FY 98 has brought many personnel changes to the PMC. Scott Edwards, Lab director, was selected for the agronomist position vacated by Herby Bloodworth who is now in Washington D.C. Scott has been Lab Director for the past 3 ½ years. His educational background includes a B.S. and M.S. in agronomy from Stephen F. Austin State University. He brings to the position much enthusiasm and technical capabilities.

Jeff Tillman, biological technician, has been detailed to the lab. Jeff is no stranger to lab operations. He received formal training from Lachat on the instrumentation and has worked in the lab during the winter months conducting water tests and performing fiber analysis. His expertise in lab operations has allowed us to continue providing a quality service to our customers.

Laura Mason retired in December after serving as Secretary for the past 10 years. Before becoming secretary, she held other positions with government agencies, including Bureau of Indian Affairs, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services, Farmers Home Administration and the Department of Defense. The PMC wishes her the best in her retirement. However, Laura has not completely left us. She signed on as a volunteer and works once a week at the PMC to do computer work. Now if we could just find someone who wants to volunteer to weed plots, mow grass, and clean seed!

Patricia Taylor replaced Laura as secretary in December. Patricia previously worked for Rural Development for eight years. She is very eager to learn about the plant materials program and about the many different kinds of plants growing at the PMC.

Plant Materials on the Internet

by: Janet Grabowski

Many of the Field Offices in Mississippi have been networked and have access to the Internet. Those of you who have seen the Mississippi home

page will have noticed a heading called "Plant Information". Under this heading there is information about the PMC as well as Mississippi planting guides and a few technical reports. This information has not been updated in quite some time because a national focus on standardizing Internet pages for all PMCs made our initial efforts obsolete.

Now, our Internet information is maintained at the National PMC in Beltsville, MD. The address to access this information is:

<http://plant-materials.nrcs.usda.gov>

In order to find information from the Mississippi PMC, click on "Plant Materials Center Locations". A map of the United States will appear with PMC locations and service areas indicated. Click on the one for Coffeeville.

As is true of many Internet pages, it is still very much a work in progress, but they are putting information on the system quickly. Soon you will be able to find our technical notes, other publications, planting guides, pictures of the PMC and information about the staff members. The Mississippi home page is going to be changed to provide two links, one to the National PMC home page and another link directly to the Mississippi PMC home page.

One link to be retained in the updated version of the Mississippi home page is to the PLANTS database. You can also access it directly at:

<http://plants.usda.gov>

This database can be an invaluable source of plant information for field office personnel. PLANTS is the recognized source for plant taxonomy and contains currently accepted names for plant materials. It also contains lists of threatened and endangered species, wetland plants, and noxious weeds. The Photo Gallery contains color pictures of plants, with the ultimate goal being to obtain pictures of all plants listed in the database.

We hope that you will visit these Internet sites when you need information about PMCs or plant materials. In future newsletter editions, we will tell you about other Internet locations that provide useful plant information.

Native Grasses

by: Joel Douglas

Using native grasses for conservation continues to gain national interest. One does not have to look much farther than the new farm bill programs such as CRP and WHIP to find the words native grasses mentioned. Many DCs in our service area are unfamiliar with native grasses like switchgrass, indiangrass, big bluestem, and little bluestem.

These grasses familiar to the plant materials program because PMCs have released many varieties or cultivars of them. If you have questions about cultivar selection, planting recommendations, management considerations or seed dealers contact the PMC or PMS in your state. Listed below are planting tips for establishing native grasses. Failure to follow any of them may result in an unsuccessful planting.

Seedbed preparation. This is the most important step in establishing native grasses. Loose uneven seedbeds are a major cause of poor stands. Your shoes or boots should sink only ½ inch into a properly prepared seedbed. Conventional tillage in the year before seeding followed by shallow disking, harrowing, and packing before seeding is desirable.

Establishment method: Native grasses can be propagated from seed. Planting rates are based on pure live seed (PLS) lb/acre and **NOT** bulk lb/acre. Do not confuse 12 pls lb/acre with 12 bulk lb/acre. Failing to recognize PLS when figuring seeding rates will jeopardize the planting. For more information on planting native grasses based on PLS refer to Grassland Technical Note 55.

Some of the seeds of these native grasses such as indiangrass and big bluestem are “trashy” in nature. Unless the drill is equipped with a fluffy seed box, planting these types of seeds is problematic. Fluffy seed will not flow through a conventional drill because surrounding seed appendages cause it to pack together. Mixing fluffy seed with a carrier such as sand or fertilizer (P and K) helps facilitate this seeding. Even with a carrier, broadcasting fluffy seed by is difficult. Cultipacking before and after seeding is very critical when the broadcast method is used.

Planting methods: Cultipack seeders or press-wheel drills with depth bands are ideal to achieve proper seed placement. Successful broadcast seeding can be achieved by increasing seeding rate and by rolling or cultipacking before and after

seeding. Cultipacking before seeding may not be needed on a prairie soil.

Planting Depth: Seeding depth is critical in establishing native grasses and legumes. Seeds sown on the surface without coverage or with greater than ½ inch deep have little chance of survival.

Planting Time: Warm season native grasses should be planted in March or April. A good rule of thumb is to plant the seed before the last frost. Avoid planting after May 1 because moisture and weed competition may delay stand establishment.

Fertilizer: Warm season native grasses can be productive on low fertility soils, but fertilization will increase plant vigor. Nitrogen and phosphorus have been shown to increase productivity. However, nitrogen promotes weed growth. Unless weed competition is low, it can be excluded the first year until a stand becomes evident.

Follow soil test recommendations for applying P, K, and lime. Incorporate lime in the fall to allow it time to adjust pH before planting in the spring. Incorporate P and K into the soil at planting time.

Weed Control: There are no labeled herbicides for establishment of native grasses. Clipping in late July to remove weed competition during the establishment year is recommended. If an annual legume or forb is included as part of the grass mixture, mowing may prevent seed production.

2,4-D can be used to control broadleaf weeds in native grasses during the first year. Apply 2,4-D after seedlings reach the four leaf stage. Follow the label and other restrictions when applying herbicide near commercial crops. If the native grass mixture contains a legume or forb do not apply 2,4-D.

Burning is another tool to control weeds. In addition to weed control, spring burning promotes rapid regrowth. Burning should be performed before the grass greens-up. This will vary from North Mississippi to South Mississippi. Native grasses are generally burned in late February at the PMC. Before burning, contact the Mississippi Forestry Commission for assistance with a burn plan.

Residue Management: Native grasses produce a tremendous amount of residue. Periodic removal of this residue will promote rapid regrowth and natural reseeding. Clipping in March to a height of 6-8 inches is recommended for residue control. Burning will also provide residue control. Refer to weed control for burning tips.

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