

*Celebration
Continued From Page 1*

This result helps to better demonstrate the reasons for Celebration's superior ability to block and hold together when harvested.

To access these research descriptions, as well as other information of interest, visit www.sodsolutions.com/research/. We update this information as new data is released by the pertinent organizations.


Sod Solutions varieties have also been involved in NTEP studies. As those studies are completed and the data is released, the pertinent information is posted on the Web at ntep.org.

Turfgrass References Desired

Sod Solutions has created reference lists for EMPIRE and Celebration. Each list, designed to be a sales tool, includes names of key U.S. locations where EMPIRE or Celebration has been installed, plus contact info. Lists can be downloaded at sodsolutions.com. We need your help to make the lists as inclusive as possible. Send us information about key jobs that your farm has installed. We will contact those sites for permission to add them to the references lists.

Many producers already use these lists. If you use, or plan to use, this resource please help us create a better tool by sending us some new site information. Contact Sis Reda at 843.849.1288 or at sreda@sodsolutions.com.

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The Fish Wrap

Sod Solutions, Inc.
P.O. Box 460
Mt. Pleasant, SC 29465

Phone
843.849.1288

Fax
843.849.1415

Web Site
www.sodsolutions.com

E-mail
info@sodsolutions.com

Above Right
Roberto Gurgel,
Sod Solutions
Agricultural
Engineering
Specialist

1994 - 2004

Sod Solutions Marks 10th Anniversary

Celebration Research

By Roberto Gurgel

Sod Solutions recently has requested turfgrass studies from two respected research institutions.  Clemson University in South Carolina and Instituto de Zootecnia (IZ) in Brazil. Clemson University has been considered a reference institution for warm season turfgrasses in the southeastern US for some years. IZ is located in São Paulo, southeast Brazil, which has a very similar climate to the southeastern United States. This climatic similarity means that pertinent turfgrass studies can be conducted under many of the same conditions found in southern regions of the United States. IZ has been breeding and developing forage and turfgrasses since the 1970s, and has an excellent academic reputation in South America.

The Clemson study was a comparative shade study evaluating the performance and turf quality (TQ) of three bermudagrasses: Tifway 419, TifSport and Celebration. The results demonstrated that Celebration maintained acceptable TQ in 58% shade, while Tifway and TifSport only had acceptable TQ in a lesser degree of shade — in 41% shade. Celebration demonstrated acceptable TQ even in 71% shade, if maintained at a 1-inch mowing height. The study clearly demonstrated Celebration's superior shade tolerance compared to other well-known bermudagrasses.

The IZ Institute study in Brazil compared the same varieties, but evaluated genetic, agronomic and morphological characteristics. Celebration proved to be genetically different from 419 and TifSport, and produced thicker, longer and overall more numerous stolons (green and dry matter) than Tifway 419 and TifSport.

Continued On Page 6

Sod Solutions will mark its tenth anniversary this month. We have been fortunate to enjoy steady growth during the last decade, and to observe and participate in many industry challenges and opportunities.

This event provides a chance to reflect upon our progress, and that of our licensed producers. While change and growth in the turfgrass industry have helped to fuel our development, we believe that it is the commitment of the licensed producers that has made the difference, each and every year.

In 1994, when Sod Solutions incorporated, there were 14 licensed producers, and just one variety, Palmetto St. Augustine. In 2004, the number of licensed producers worldwide has increased to more than 140 in the U.S., Australia, Brazil and South Africa. We have released EMPIRE Zoysia, EMPRESS Zoysia, and Celebration Bermudagrass. Another, Sapphire™ St. Augustine, will be involved in a pre-release program this year.

Although the number of varieties and licensed producers has changed, some things have stayed the same: the dedication of the producers to growing a quality product, and their commitment to the turfgrasses. Only with your foresight and attention to superior production standards have we been able to develop, release and deliver improved warm season varieties to the marketplace.

We thank you for your support, your business and your friendship.



Think You've Seen It All?
Check Out Recent Installs,
A New Radio Commercial, and More at
www.sodsolutions.com

Sapphire St. Augustine Pre-Release Program Emphasizes Comparative Research



Sapphire St. Augustine Evaluation Trials

By Joel Lane, Field Technical Representative

Sod Solutions will conduct Sapphire St. Augustine comparative evaluation trials beginning this spring. The program, which will be conducted at a total of 20 trial sites throughout the Southern United States, will be overseen by Auburn University's Turfgrass Extension Specialist, Dr. David Han.



The study, utilizing observations made at these various trial sites (including four university locations), will provide a basis for both physical and morphologic comparisons between Sapphire, Palmetto St. Augustine, and other standard St. Augustine varieties.

Examples of some of the evaluation criteria include: rate of ground coverage, fall color retention/spring green up, cold tolerance, drought resistance/tolerance, insect/disease resistance, etc. The data collected will increase the comparative information available for Sapphire, as well as provide test collaborators and site hosts with first hand knowledge of the variety. We plan that this study will provide future Sapphire licensees with data that will reinforce the already positive existing data and "real world" performance record originating in Australia.

Although the trials will last indefinitely, you may inquire about Sapphire's performance at any time with Sod Solutions' field representatives. As planned, this study will be one of many that will help you determine what products will better serve your customers.

Sod Solutions is introducing Sapphire™ St. Augustine to the United States this year. This turfgrass features improved characteristics: dark green color; purple stems; rapid production rate; and a semi-dwarf texture with rolled leaves. Sapphire offers impressive drought tolerance. We expect that intensive testing will confirm Sapphire's resistance to pests and disease.



Unique comparative evaluation trials will be conducted during 2004-2005. The trials include programs that follow traditional research regimens, while agronomic considerations are tested and proved at turfgrass production farms. Goals are to maximize the collection of specific, relevant data within pertinent parameters, and to ensure independently derived results. Results will help confirm Sapphire's climatic adaptability and further refine its potential for full release. Read more about the research on this page.

"The combination of traditional research and 'trial by production' will foster collaboration between the academic community, the producers, and Sod Solutions," says Tobey Wagner. "We believe that the data derived from the universities, and the experience gained from the production sites, will allow us to offer another viable improved variety." A key benefit of the evaluation program is that producers have the opportunity to grow and observe Sapphire prior to making a long-term decision about licensing.

Sapphire was developed in New South Wales, Australia by Todd Layt of Ozbreed Pty. Ltd. Limited amounts of Sapphire will be in production this year; and it is expected that some will be available for purchase this fall.

Tech Talk

Above Left
Sapphire St. Augustine has long, thick stolons.

Seventh Annual Producers Meetings Held in January Turfgrass Program Plans, Sporting Clays Are Highlights



Sis Reda
Director of Marketing

During the last week of January, we held the annual producers meetings. As in the past, Sod Solutions scheduled two regional meetings in one week. However, this year, in an effort to make attendance more relaxing and rewarding, some activities took place outdoors; and each meeting included an afternoon of sporting clays recreation.

We met with licensed producers from western regions in Bay City, Texas; and with "eastern" producers in Orlando, FL.



Producers, guests, industry professionals and media representatives attended. Each meeting included turfgrass program updates; a review of 2003 marketing; 2004 marketing strategies; a technical "walk & talk" in the fields; and a barbecue lunch. We also introduced the Sapphire St. Augustine pre-release program, including planned evaluation trial activities.

Following lunch, many of us participated in the sporting clays events. In Texas, we went to Coastal Wild Wings, where we enjoyed joking with one another about shooting scores and styles. A special thanks to Tuffy Tweedle of Hansen Farm for arranging this outing. In Florida, we shot from many challenging stations at TM Ranch. The highest scorer at each meeting took home a new Cabela's stainless steel rifle case. Others of us took home bruised shoulders and a resolution to practice more often!

We would like to thank Rod Farm and Kirkland Sod Farms for hosting the tours. It was great to see so many of you again.

Market Rap

Above Right
Taking a break during shooting at TM Ranch.

Marketing Highlights January - April 2004

January

- Sod Solutions Annual Producers Meetings - Bay City, TX and Orlando, FL
- 1 Ad in Turf Industry Publication
- Attendance at NC Turfgrass Show - Jan. 6-7, Charlotte, NC
- Celebration, EMPIRE Professional References Distributed, Posted at sodsolutions.com.

February

- Booth Space at Spring Home & Garden Expo - Feb. 20-22, Corpus Christi, TX
- TPI Midwinter Conference - Feb. 17-21, Santa Barbara, CA
- Attendance, Presentation at GCSAA Conference, Feb. 9-14, San Diego, CA
- Event Support - EMPIRE Meeting, SMR Turf & Trees - Feb. 26, Bradenton, FL
- 2 Ads in Turf Industry Publications
- Palmetto Brochure Reprint
- Sapphire Pre-Release Program News Release

March

- 4 Ads in Turf Industry Publications
- "Classic Gardens" EMPIRE Radio Interview, Birmingham, AL
- Celebration Product News Release

April

- Celebration Radio Ads, "Neil Sperry's Lawn & Garden", Texas State Network
- 5 Ads in Turf Industry Publications
- FSGC Field Day - April 27, Celebration Turf, Ruskin, FL
- Sales, Marketing Visits - Australia
- Celebration Brochure Reprint
- New Celebration Print Ad Composed/Available to Producers
- Sod Solutions 10th Anniversary News Release to Turf Industry Publications
- Internet Promotion Initiated



We **know** you read each *Fish Wrap* from cover to cover. The newsletter has lots of producer-oriented program and marketing information. Here's another reason to look forward to each newsletter: we've hidden a small blue fish in the pages of this issue. Be the first to find it and tell Sis Reda at Sod Solutions, and you'll win a Palmetto, EMPIRE, or Celebration golf shirt. Sis is at 843.849.1288 or sreda@sodsolutions.com.

internationally, to 43 in Brazil, South Africa and Australia. Today, it is believed that Palmetto is the top selling patented warm season turf variety in the industry.

International travel has afforded me the opportunity to meet many prominent turf breeders from other parts of the world. Sod Solutions has tapped these international breeders as sources of new plant material to bring innovation to the United States industry. Roberto Gurgel is the Brazilian breeder of EMPIRE Zoysia and EMPRESS Zoysia, released by Sod Solutions in 1999. EMPIRE and EMPRESS are rapid growing, hardy varieties of zoysiagrass known for their ability to withstand heat and humidity. Roberto's turf expertise and his commitment to innovation have contributed much to Sod Solutions growth and success. I was thrilled last year with the opportunity to hire Roberto.

Celebration Bermudagrass was released by Sod Solutions in 2001. Celebration was developed by Rod Riley, an acclaimed Australian turf breeder. Riley was awarded the Australian Medal of Honor for his contributions to the Australian turf industry. Celebration Bermuda can be rapidly produced, has beautiful uniform color, and is suited to a wide range of applications.

Another Australian selection, Sapphire St. Augustine, was developed by Todd Layt. Sapphire will be offered to a limited number of growers this year in a new "pre-release" program. This program will be combined with a collaborative 20-site, 4-university, nationwide comparative trial headed by Dr. Dave Han, Auburn University. The program will further refine the process of generating performance evaluation data at the farm production level for Sapphire and other cultivars. The Sapphire evaluation process is described on Page 2 of this newsletter.

Of course, the best products in the world do not guarantee success until their advantages are effectively communicated. I have to tip my hat to the marketing professionals that have contributed to Sod

Solutions' success. During this time of accelerated growth, an extensive marketing strategy was developed and implemented under the leadership of Greg Douglas, hired in 1999 to oversee the general operations of the company, and by Sis Reda, hired in 2001 as Marketing Director. Greg and Sis have effectively identified the goals of our programs and implemented plans to accomplish them.

Ann Taylor, my personal assistant, who joined the company in 2001, keeps me focused and organized, and is involved in a number of key business activities. Brenda Roberts has served as office administrator since 1999. Ann and Brenda are most often the friendly voices who answer calls. They are always ready to lend a helping hand. Joel Lane, hired in 2001, and Roberto Gurgel are the technical field experts that work with the growers on a daily basis to solve production and maintenance issues. My wife and partner, Lee Ann, is my sounding board. Lee Ann believed in me enough to agree to start a business 10 years ago from our dining room, while raising a family.

Sod Solutions' greatest strength and asset is the extensive network of licensed producers. We take pride in our company and its products, but most of all we value the growers who make it all possible. The growers are truly a part of our "extended family".

The future of Sod Solutions is exciting. We are developing new partnerships. Five independent breeders and breeding programs are underway to develop even better future turf products. Current activities include research and development for St. Augustine, Bermuda, Zoysia, Paspalum, Centipede and other lesser known, new species of grass. Sod Solutions is engaged with universities to develop and test potential releases for the future. We are committed to finding the best turfgrass products; a commitment exemplified by our motto, "We Go to the Ends of the Earth". Thank you for your continued confidence and business.



Tobey Wagner
President

Tobey Talk



Tobey Wagner
President

Tobey Talk

Above Right
Tobey Wagner,
during a
recent visit to
Australia.

1994 - 2004

A Decade of Challenge, Opportunity

In April Sod Solutions celebrates its tenth anniversary. Just as parents fondly watch old home videos of their children, it is enjoyable to reminisce about the successes and struggles that have shaped the company and its products into what they are today.

The journey began in early 1990 when an article about FX-10, a new St. Augustinegrass developed in Florida, captured my attention. Although my university degree was in Mechanical Engineering, my real desire was to be an entrepreneur. Plants, sod, and the agricultural industry in general most closely paralleled my interests. The article sparked a crazy idea to develop agreements with licensed growers of the new Florida grass. The strategy of the business model was to confirm all the producers on the Interstate I-95 corridor in Florida, and then broker FX-10 northward to the southeastern coastal states. Kirkland Farms of New Smyrna Beach, Florida was the most northern producer of FX-10; and after several visits, we developed a strong relationship. Elmer and Stella Kirkland and their family welcomed me and taught me many things about the turf business.

As fate would have it, FX-10 froze out on the coast of South Carolina during that first winter. But, as often happens in life, when one door closes, another opens. Elmer Kirkland had developed a new St. Augustine cultivar that had survived the hard winter and also demonstrated other improved growth characteristics. The original business idea of brokering turf northward from Florida expanded to a much larger business objective. Sod Solutions incorporated in 1994 and dedicated itself to the development and release of improved warm season turf varieties. Sod Solutions' goal from inception has been to provide innovation to the turf industry by supplementing new product development with coordinated marketing and "real world" testing accomplished



through the involvement of a network of committed licensed growers. As demonstrated by the FX-10 experience, universities are in a restricted position to supplement their research and product development efforts with "real world" performance testing and marketing. As a private enterprise, Sod Solutions fills this void in the warm season turf industry.

The new grass developed by Elmer Kirkland, Palmetto™ St. Augustine, became Sod Solutions' flagship product. The first growers to commit to the program were Kirkland Sod Farms, Floriturf, H & H Sod, and Bethel Farms. Gary Resmondo, of Gary L. Resmondo Sod, contributed early on by allowing Sod Solutions to exhibit at his farm during a Florida Sod Growers Co-Op Field Day. Dr. Philip Busey, Associate Professor of Environmental Horticulture at the University of Florida, was instrumental in assisting with the successful patent application. After Sod Solutions joined TPI (Turfgrass Producers International), news of Palmetto's success spread like wildfire. Growers continued to license across the United States, and international inquiries soon followed. The number of licensees from coast to coast in the United States has continued to expand over the years to more than 100; and