

Marketing Roundup Continued From Page 5

Licensed Producers' Meeting, The Villages, Florida. A January meeting at



The Villages, one of the largest retirement communities in the world, brought Sod Solutions and EMPIRE producers together with Villages staff to talk about EMPIRE's attributes and availability. The Villages has recently begun specifying EMPIRE for all home and common area landscapes.

Shown in the above photo are (left to right): Mac Carraway, SMR Turf & Trees; Greg Douglas, Sod Solutions; Clyde Lavendar, A. Duda & Sons; Joel Lane, Sod Solutions; Richard Burns, Star Farms; Gary Bradshaw, SMR Turf & Trees; Dave Basquin, Silver Strand; Travis Council, Council Growers.

Florida Nursery & Associated Trades Show, Orlando, FL. Sod Solutions and the Florida Sod Growers Cooperative (FSGC) shared a trade show booth with VersaScapes, Sod Solutions' "sister company" at this major regional event. Sod Solutions varieties and the FSGC were highlighted at the booth to several thousand green industry show attendees. In this photo, Betsy McGill of the FSGC and Sam McCoy of VersaScapes visit with George W. Bush and John Kerry. (The President and the then-candidate were actually life-size cutouts).



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Above Right
Joel Lane,
Sod Solutions
Field
Representative

Sapphire St. Augustine Comparative Evaluations Turf Quality, Color Are Superior



New Chemicals

By Joel Lane

There are a number of new chemicals that are either already available or will be available over the next several months. They are listed below in appropriate categories with the manufacturer noted in parentheses. Please contact a chemical salesperson for answers to specific label questions.



HERBICIDES

Velocity (Valent): Designed primarily to take *Poa annua* out of ryegrass. This includes ryegrass overseeded into bermudagrass.

Monument (Syngenta): This product is also used as a "transition aid" in taking cool season grasses out of warm-season grasses. However, its primary use is for taking a variety of different sedgegrasses out of turf. One researcher has stated that it is better than Semptra (a.k.a. Manage) at sedge control. It can be used on both bermudagrass and zoysiagrass. It is possible that a St. Augustinegrass label will be added. Do not use on centipedegrass.

Certainty (Monsanto): Very similar product to Monument in weeds it will control. It is not labeled for centipedegrass. Also an excellent product according to one researcher.

INSECTICIDES

Allectus (joint-Bayer and FMC): This product combines Talstar and Merit. Obvious advantage of this product is that it will control both adult and larval forms of certain pests. The one most important to producers will be for billbug control in EMPIRE. Manufacturer representatives are seeing a synergistic effect when the two products are combined in the formulation process. Supposedly, this enhances the product over a tank-mix of the two products.

In April 2004, comparative evaluations began for the purpose of further quantifying characteristics of Sapphire™ St. Augustine. Twenty-one evaluation sites across the southern US were selected to host these evaluations. Each site was constructed to a specified protocol that comprised: pre-plant herbicide application, plot dimensioning and configuration, replication instruction, establishment regimen, and maintenance guidelines.

At each site, Sapphire was compared to other local 'standard' St. Augustinegrass varieties (each site used two or three standard varieties for comparison ... specifically Palmetto (US PP#9,395), Raleigh or Floratam). All sites were constructed with three replications of each variety used.

90 DAP Results

In August 2004, observations from eight representative sites were collected and analyzed. These findings are discussed below:

- **Overall Turf Quality**
Compared to St. Augustinegrass varieties Palmetto (US PP#9,395), Raleigh and Floratam, Sapphire was characterized as developing a higher overall turf quality at the 30, 60 and 90 DAP observations.
- **Color**
Sapphire consistently exhibited a more pleasing genetic color than Palmetto, Raleigh or Floratam. This characteristic was most notable during 60 and 90 DAP observations.

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New Research Articles
And Other Data Have Been
Posted At Our Website
www.sodsolutions.com

Sapphire St. Augustine Comparative Evaluation

Sapphire St. Augustine Comparative Evaluations Test Sites

AU – Auburn / Auburn, GA
 UF – West Florida / Jay, FL
 LSU – Burden / Baton Rouge, LA
 UGA – Griffin / Griffin, GA
 UT – Martin / Martin, TN
 VT – Hampton Roads / Va. Beach, VA
 Bethel Farms / Arcadia, FL
 H&H Sod / Kenansville, FL
 Sod Solutions Research Center / Mt. Pleasant, SC
 Carolina Turf / Raeford, NC
 Southern Belle / Zuni, FL
 Double Springs Grass Farms / Searcy, AR
 Cane Creek Sod / Cardwell, MO
 Del's Nursery & Landscape / San Antonio, TX
 Wittig Grass Farms / Boling, TX
 Trinity Turf Nursery / Pilot Point, TX
 Murff Turf Farms / Crosby, TX
 Gardner Turfgrass / Santa Teresa, NM
 Evergreen Turf / Tempe, AZ
 Craft Farms / Foley, AL
 Turf Grass Farms / Welsh, LA

Be A Fish Finder

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 read each newsletter: we've hidden a small blue fish in the pages. 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.

Sapphire St. Augustine - From Page 1

- **Ground Coverage**
The rate at which Sapphire grew to cover its test plots was significantly faster than that of Palmetto or Raleigh. Although the difference was not as significant when compared to Floratam, an increased coverage rate was also observed.

- **Diseases**
The occurrence of disease, specifically Gray Leaf Spot, was notably lower in Sapphire and Raleigh at 90 DAP. At 60 DAP, Sapphire, Palmetto and Raleigh all had a much lower occurrence of Gray Leaf Spot than Floratam.

Summary

Comparative observations of Sapphire were taken as part of an on-going multi-site, geographically diverse evaluation regimen which began in April 2004. Analysis of these 30, 60, and 90 DAP observations clearly identified characteristics of Sapphire that differentiate it from Palmetto, Raleigh and Floratam St. Augustine-grasses.

Notably, enhanced **Turf Quality** and **Color** augments Sapphire's marketability, as producers and consumers generally prefer turfgrass varieties that are more aesthetically pleasing. Increased **Ground Coverage** rates reduce production and overhead costs and provide turfgrass producers with larger profit margins and quicker harvest cycles. Also, **Reduced Occurrence of Diseases**, specifically Gray Leaf Spot, reduces the need for fungicide inputs during production and end-use; thereby reducing costs and minimizing potential environmental impacts from chemical applications.



Greg Douglas
Vice President

Tech Talk

Above Left
Sapphire St. Augustine has increased ground coverage rates.

Marketing Roundup

Collaborative Efforts Support the Brands

Recently there have been unique opportunities for collaborative marketing and sales efforts. Licensed producers have worked with Sod Solutions and/or other producers to create a variety of special events and programs. Benefits have extended beyond those experienced by the immediate participants in an activity: visibility and demand for a brand, or several brands, have increased across an entire area, region, or customer segment.

Here are a few photos taken at some recent collaborative events, along with a few details about the activity and its value to the turfgrass programs and producers:

Rhyne's Select Turf Field Day, Benton, AL. The Field Day in September included EMPIRE presentations, dove shoot, lunch, and farm tour. Sod Solutions provided EMPIRE info. and lunch. Landscape architects, contractors, homebuilders, engineers, and others seemed impressed with EMPIRE; and their interest has broadened knowledge of EMPIRE throughout Alabama.

Texas Turfgrass Association Winter Institute, Grapevine, TX. The 2004 Institute in Grapevine included a trade show. The Turfgrass Producers of Texas and Sod Solutions shared a booth that promoted Celebration Bermudagrass and the Texas farms that produce it. It was felt that the event was a good opportunity to showcase the turfgrass to key customer segments from all regions of the state.



Above Right Top
Event "under the tent" at Rhyne's Select Turf.

Above Right Bottom
The Sod Solutions TPT Booth at the TTA Winter Institute.

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Marketing Highlights September '04 - January '05

September

- 5 Ads in Turf Industry Publications
- Rhyne's Select Turf Field Day - September 11, Benton, AL
- Florida Nursery & Allied Trades Event (FNATS) - Sept. 30 - Oct. 2, Orlando, FL

October

- 3 Ads in Turf Industry Publications
- Triangle Turfgrass Association Luncheon - Oct. 18, Carolina Trace Country Club, Sanford, NC

November

- 2 Ads in Turf Industry Publications
- Bethel Farms Field Day - Nov. 9, Arcadia, FL

December

- Texas Turfgrass Association Winter Institute - Dec. 6-8, Grapevine, TX
- 3 Ads in Turf Industry Publications

January

- Gulf States Horticultural Expo - Jan. 20-22, Mobile, AL
- Turfgrass Producers of Texas Annual Conference & Trade Show - Jan. 18, Bay City, TX



water for several weeks. Both turned brown; yet when the water was restored, the Floratam was dead, while the EMPIRE quickly grew back from dormancy!

Word spread rapidly about EMPIRE and how it had survived during drought. This awareness spawned discussion on the benefits of EMPIRE for widespread landscape use. By 2004, EMPIRE was being used in more than 10 major developments, including "The Villages", a development located in central Florida that was billed as the largest single site home development in the world. Producers were already at maximum capacity when our expectations that EMPIRE would take hold in Florida developed into reality.

During the expansion stage in 2002, The Villages used EMPIRE around a couple of postal facilities. A presentation sponsored by a central Florida grower was given by Sod Solutions to The Villages staff and contractors, and featured all of Sod Solutions' new turfgrasses, including EMPIRE Zoysia. A local television station aired a segment about EMPIRE that appeared on a major Orlando station.

Fast forward nearly three years. A producer contacted Sod Solutions and relayed that, due to a water management agency's pressure on The Villages to stay within allocated amounts of water use, and the fact that the initial demonstration site of EMPIRE at the postal facilities were performing well, the Villages was now specifying EMPIRE throughout the entire development at a rate of over 750 acres a year. Excitement became perplexity as it was considered how local growers could supply a volume of EMPIRE to a single



development that equaled the current total amount of EMPIRE produced and used across the state of Florida.

A plan has been developed for supplying The Villages, using two primary contacts working with Sod Solutions to locate and deliver EMPIRE from all over the southeast, until the Florida growers can expand to accommodate demand. A recent tour of commercial and residential sites successfully using EMPIRE throughout The Villages demonstrated the positive impact of the plan. Cooperation between the network of Sod Solution producers

is essential to the success of this project.

The Villages, as well as many other developments in Florida, is expected to continue specifying EMPIRE, and to create a snowball of demand

in subsequent years. Other states will follow as testimonials extend through the industry. The technical property of drought tolerance is only one of the improved qualities of EMPIRE. Other advantages are finer texture, soft blades, beautiful color, low maintenance, and fewer weed problems as compared to Floratam. These benefits are driving producers to expand as fast as they can.

EMPIRE is likely to become the new "look and demand" of Florida, which will provide many benefits to homeowners and landscapers. Although EMPIRE got its "foot in the door" with low water and maintenance requirements, landscapers and homeowners like it simply because it has a finer texture compared to St. Augustine ... and it just looks great!



Tobey Wagner
President

Tobey Talk

Left Center
The Villages, FL



Tobey Wagner
President

Tobey Talk

Above Right Top

Roberto Gurgel, Sod Solutions Agricultural Engineering Specialist, identified a new zoysiagrass in Brazil in the 1990s.

Above Right Bottom

EMPIRE Zoysia is fast-growing and covers over quickly.

EMPIRE Zoysia

Moving Toward Path of Destiny in Florida

In the early 1990s, Roberto Gurgel isolated a medium-bladed fast growing sprig of zoysiagrass in Brazil while working for Itograss Agricola. Fifteen years later that grass is called EMPIRE, and it is proving to reduce water usage across the southern United States, while providing a beautiful landscape for homeowners and other users. EMPIRE was released in 1999. It is now being produced by growers throughout the southern United States, Brazil, South Africa, and Australia. I would like to describe the remarkable recent events in Florida that are leading EMPIRE to gain significant market share in a state that, for the last thirty years, has heavily used an African St. Augustine called Floratam. Florida will likely be the state that is looked back upon as the region where EMPIRE was "discovered" in America.



Floratam St. Augustinegrass is entrenched into the lifestyle of Floridians. It has been the dominant turfgrass in the region for many years. Growers of Floratam produce it for economic reasons, including relatively easy and fast production. Floratam was released for the (now diminished) benefit of chinch bug resistance, but the variety gained popularity years later when the economies of production were realized by the industry. When Floratam was released in the early 1970s, the population of Florida was only a fraction of what it is today. Water

issues were relatively non-existent. Today is very different: the primary issues in the turf and landscape industries are water, water, water; and low inputs. St. Augustinegrass is perceived as being a high water user by most outside entities; and it has come under political fire across many regions of the United States.

At a recent Florida Sod Growers Co-op meeting in central Florida, the state's Agriculture Commissioner, Charles Bronson, discussed a "build out plan of Florida" describing a scenario in which 90 million people could occupy the state in the future. Florida's population is presently about 19 million people, and is "busting at the seams" in many urban locations. Demand for resources has created the problem of severe water shortage issues in many metropolitan areas. The status quo of landscape designs that require high water use cannot continue. Such landscapes are already being restricted politically through mandatory water restrictions and landscape design modifications.

EMPIRE Zoysia is perfectly positioned to fit the needs of water-conscious users and communities. When EMPIRE arrived in Florida in 1999, it was produced by a handful of growers, and was touted as a drought tolerant turf variety that requires less maintenance. During the summer drought of 2002, a real estate development which was using EMPIRE on a test basis experienced an irrigation malfunction during an extended period of drought. EMPIRE and Floratam were in the same area, and received no