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FSGC Signs Unique Joint Release Agreement for Sapphire™ St. Augustine

By Betsy McGill, Executive Director, Florida Sod Growers Cooperative

Although Floratam has long reigned as the king of St. Augustinegrasses in Florida, homeowners and landscapers can now choose from a wide array of new St. Augustine cultivars, each sporting unique and improved characteristics designed to meet specific needs or preferences. One of the newest is a deep blue-green variety called Sapphire™, which was recently released in Florida through a unique joint agreement between the Florida Sod Growers Cooperative (FSGC) and Sod Solutions, Inc., a private turfgrass development company. Patterned after the successful launch of Celebration™ bermudagrass in 2002, the joint release is only the second of its kind for the FSGC.



The agreement between the FSGC and Sod Solutions is designed to support the association's efforts on behalf of the state's sod industry, as well as provide for the variety's release to licensed producers throughout the state. The FSGC will participate in marketing and program oversight, and FSGC members will be afforded an exclusive opportunity to produce this improved warm-season grass in Florida.

Originally developed by Australian breeder Todd Layt, Sapphire is known as Sapphire Soft Leaf Buffalo in Australia, where it's a commercial success as a distinctively improved variety. According to Sod Solutions president Tobey Wagner, Sapphire was selected for release in Florida because it is well suited to the local climate and will appeal to homeowners, municipalities and commercial entities.



"Sapphire is heat tolerant and handles drought and other stresses very well," says Wagner. "This turfgrass creates a beautiful deep blue-green, soft-textured landscape that's suitable for both home and commercial applications."

Sapphire exhibits vigorous horizontal growth, resulting in rapid grow-in time and producing a thick, lush turf that is both durable and weed resistant. Another unique characteristic is its soft feel and infolded leaf blade

that, when mature, gives the grass a fine-leaf appearance. It has excellent color retention in the fall, is adaptable to a wide variety of soil types and has shown promise for increased shade tolerance.

Wagner also says the variety has been rigorously tested and evaluated by turfgrass researchers and producers across the country. Certification through the Southern Seed Association will be required of all licensed producers.

“This is an excellent way to release a new variety of turfgrass in Florida,” says FSGC president Dave Dymond. “The first-ever joint-release agreement, which we have participated in with Sod Solutions since 2002, worked very well for Celebration bermudagrass. We saw that this type of arrangement enabled the turfgrass to get to market more quickly, and there is no better group to produce Sapphire than those growers who are members of the FSGC.”

Sapphire is available both as sod and in plug trays. Although the grass will be available in other states, only FSGC members were eligible for licensing in Florida.

For more about the Florida Sod Growers Cooperative, including membership information, please contact the FSGC at (863) 675-2144 or visit www.floridasodgrowers.com. Additional information about Sapphire St. Augustine and other Sod Solutions patented varieties can be found at www.sodsolutions.com.

PHOTO CUTLINES

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Left to right, Tobey Wagner (Sod Solutions, Inc.), Todd Layt (Ozbreed Pty. Ltd.) and Richard Burns (Star Farms) check grow-in at Star Farms in Belle Glade, Florida. Layt is the original breeder of Sapphire, which originated in Australia.