



This semi-annual newsletter is published by the USDA-NRCS Plant Materials Center, 14119 Broad Street, Brooksville, FL 34601-4525, Tel: 352-796-9600, FAX: 352-799-7305. E-mail: cmaura@fl.nrcs.usda.gov

A Clean Sweep of Florida

The PMC would like to extend a big 'thank you' to all of the NRCS field, area and state office personnel who assisted us with our collections of lopsided indiagrass (*Sorghastrum secundum*) and chalky bluestem (*Andropogon capillipes*) this fall. A secretary or two even got in on the action (including ours), and we see some of you enlisted the help of other agency personnel. Nice team effort! With your help, we were able to gather 125 indiagrass collections and 81 bluestem collections (to date). Indiagrass collections extended from Santa Rosa Co. in the pan handle to Collier Co. in So. Fla. Following are the names that appeared on the collection sheets: Boetger, Cheyne & Crosby, Collar & Brown, Craft & Ammons, Crockett, Estabrook & B. Smith, Fults - Swims & Benetis, Hancock, Harb & Baldwin, Hauer, Lawrence, Moore, Oliver, Perry & Lackman, Reyes, Sanders, T. Smith - Hinote & Adkinson, Stephen & Porter, Watts, McGraw, Duncan & Finch, and Darryl Williams up in Crestview.

The award for most collections definitely goes to Gene Fults and his team at the Kissimmee FO. They sent us nine generous collections of indiagrass from seven counties. We know how much time and travel it took to do that. Nice work!

We would also like to thank Pete Deal, State Range Conservationist, for taking 3 days out of his busy schedule to help us collect chalky bluestem on several large ranches and preserves in central and south Fla. It was a wonderful opportunity for us to make some new acquaintances and find some good sources of native species in their natural habitat. Thanks for opening those doors for us Pete.

We will begin planting these collections in the greenhouse in mid December, and in the field in January if possible, so, if you have any more collections stashed in your office, please send them to us right away. Who knows, your collection may be the one that outshines all the others!

Five More Years For FIPR

We have cause to stop and check our fortitude, but, here we go again! That's right, we are going to spend another five years trying to develop native grasses, with the Florida Institute of Phosphate Research (FIPR), that can be harvested and direct seeded mechanically on a large scale (a major challenge when it comes to Florida upland species). On October 25, 1996, the FIPR board members agreed to fund the project for five years, after hearing input from various individuals on the challenges of developing native seed sources and how great the demand is.

The work begun under the previous agreement to identify promising species will continue on a smaller scale. However, most future work will focus on developing cultivars of the best grass candidates, and finding ways to direct seed native grasses mechanically. Production fields are also being established at the PMC to test cultural management practices. Seed viability in native stands is usually poor. Putting native species under cultivation can substantially increase seed viability. However, no one is very eager to do this because it is risky (weed competition can be really fierce in Florida), expensive, and there are still a lot of unanswered questions. With a little good science, a lot of hard work and few desperate prayers for rain at just the right time, we hope to answer a lot questions in the next five years. We'll keep you posted.

*Happy
Holidays
From
The
Brooksville
PMC*

Puerto Rico to Host '97 STC Advisory Committee Meeting

The annual meeting of the STC Advisory Committee for the Florida PMC will be held in the Caribbean Area April 21 to 25, 1997. Participants from Florida, Alabama, Georgia, NHQ and The Caribbean Area will meet in Puerto Rico where they will have the opportunity to share field observations and on going work of the Plant Materials Facility in Lajas. The meeting will include an educational field trip to observe performance of ground covers or living mulches in coffee, vegetative barriers of vetiver grass and plants with potential as green manure for pineapple plantations.

Schools Assist With Dunes

Okaloosa County received assistance from students of local schools on dune restoration and protection by erecting an educational bulletin board explaining dune preservation at Beasley Park. This display will aid in the education of the public on rebuilding and preventing the destruction of dunes by severe tropical storms or hurricanes. The students also planted additional vegetation in front of the park.

Florosa Elementary School students will also be assisting with preservation efforts in this panhandle community, by growing sea oats on their campus for replanting on the barrier island.

Wiregrass - Ally or Enemy!

Wiregrass (*Aristida stricta*) is classified as an invasive grass when it comes to rangeland but is considered an important component of pineland

habitats, because of its ability to *carry* fire. In native situations, wiregrass contributes a large percentage of the fuel for understory burn management programs. Foresters and conservation groups are attempting to restore thousands of acres of wiregrass habitat in FL. However, there are some problems associated with direct seeding this species. One of the first problems to overcome is finding or developing a viable seed source. Wiregrass only blooms after a growing season burn. However, the timing of the burn and the number of years between burns also effect seed viability. In order to develop sound management practices which will increase seed production, a plot of wiregrass (approx. 1/4 ac.) was established at the PMC in 1996, by transplanting seedlings in March. To our delight, these seedlings flourished, and produced seed this fall. A pound of seed was harvested from this plot in early December (approx. 450,000 seeds/lb). Next year a replicated study of our wiregrass field will be established to develop practices commercial growers can use for production.

Team Effort

During this time of year we most often reflect on accomplishments of the year, such as, have we exceeded, successfully met, or been unable to meet projected goals. The Brooksville PMC Team can happily say, in most instances, we have exceeded our projected goals. This was accomplished not only with the extra effort expended by our staff, but with the assistance of district employees, volunteers, and NRCS field office personnel throughout the state. Thank you everyone for being part of our team during 1996 and we look forward to the same team effort in the coming year.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status. (Not all bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at 202-720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964 (voice or TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.