

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

Cape May Plant Materials Center  
Cape May Courthouse, NJ

NOTICE OF RELEASE OF SUTHER PRAIRIE GERMPLASM BIG BLUESTEM

SOURCE-IDENTIFIED CLASS OF NATURAL GERMPLASM

The Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture announces the release of a source-identified ecotype of Big bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii* (Vitman)).

As a source identified release, this plant will be referred to as Suther Germplasm Big bluestem. It has been assigned the NRCS accession number 9082318. Suther Germplasm Big bluestem is released as a source identified type of certified seed.

This alternative release procedure is justified because this genetic material was collected from a remnant eastern piedmont prairie. Development threats, long history, and significant size of the Suther Farm makes this an important ecological and cultural asset.

**Collection Site Information:** Suther Prairie big bluestem was collected from a wet prairie 27 miles Northeast of Charlotte NC in the floodplain of the Dutch Buffalo Creek a tributary of the Rocky River at about 680 feet above sea level. Cabarrus County NC, 27 miles northeast of Charlotte NC is in the piedmont of North Carolina; plant hardiness zone 7a; 114-139 cm (45-55 inches) of precipitation per year with a mean July temperature of 26.1 C (79 F) and a mean January temperature of 5.5 degrees C. (42 degrees F.)

**Ecotype Description:** Big bluestem, is a native, perennial, warm season grass that occurs from the short grass prairie region to the Atlantic Ocean. It is tufted with short, scaly rhizomes that forms a sod. Big bluestem is tall, reaching a height of 6 to 8 feet on mast sites where it is protected from grazing. It is very leafy at the base, with some leaves carried up on the stem. The seed heads normally have 3 spikelets that appear like a 'turkey foot.'

**Ecological Considerations and Evaluation:** An environmental evaluation (attached) was done as directed by policy. There are no limitations or cautions on its use.

**Anticipated Conservation Use:** Suther Prairie Germplasm Big Bluestem is recommended for roadside revegetation, critical areas, wildlife habitat, parks, recreational areas, landscapes, and prairie restoration.

Big bluestem can provide hay and forage to all classes of livestock. Its forage rates good to excellent if plants are utilized in the leafy stage and before seed head emergence. It is an important part of prairie pastures and is considered a long-lived perennial.

**Potential Area of Adaptation:** This release is recommended for planting throughout the Mid-Atlantic area of the Eastern U.S.

**Availability of Plant Materials:** Original germplasm material may be obtained through the Cape May Plant Materials Center, 1536 Route 9 North, Cape May Courthouse, NJ 08210. Phone: (609) 465-5901 FAX: (609) 465-9284.

**References:**

Hitchcock, A.S., *Manual of the Grasses of the United States*. 1950. USDA Misc. Publ. 200. Revised 1951

Estep, Bret and McRae, Catherine. *Prairie Restoration and Management Plan, Suther Farm Prairie*. University of N.C. at Charlotte. Unpublished report. 1997, Revised 1999

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Signatures for release of:

Suther Germplasm Big Bluestem (*Andropogongerardii*)

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Thomas Drewes  
Acting State Conservationist  
United States Department of Agriculture  
Natural Resources Conservation Service  
Somerset, NJ

5-02-02

Date



for

Diane Gelburd  
Director, Ecological Sciences Division  
United States Department of Agriculture  
Natural Resources Conservation Service  
Washington, D.C.

7/1/02

Date