TECHNICAL NOTES

U.S. Department of Agriculture | Natural Resources Conservation Service

TN - PLANT MATERIALS - 56 | JUNE 1999

WHAT YOU CAN ASK FOR FROM THE USDA- NRCS CALIFORNIA PLANT MATERIALS PROGRAM

This technical note will help landowners understand the types of assistance they might receive when trying to find vegetative solutions to conservation problems. The California plant materials program and the Lockeford Plant Materials Center (PMC) provide plant science support to the USDA - NRCS California Field Offices. The California Plant Materials Center in Lockeford collects promising plants and tests their performance under a variety of soil, climatic and use conditions. Over the past fifty years, 27 plants have been released for commercial seed production to solve soil and water conservation problems.

Resource Conservation Districts (RCD's) receive input from many local landowners and provide direction to field offices and the PMC. Usually, the first contact a landowner has with the NRCS is with the field office. Staff work with the landowner to determine the overall assistance needed by developing a conservation plan. If plant science needs are identified, field office staff will request assistance from the Plant Materials Program and PMC. This might include plant evaluations, cultural studies and a site visit to look at conservation problems. As a starting point, staff might recommend conservation practices such as a range seeding or grass waterway and would use the Vegetative Guide of the Field Office Technical Guide to identify suitable plants. The field office staff might also suggest that the landowner contact the PMC directly regarding unique and complex information requests. This might include a search for information such as seeding rates and depths or other seed mixes.

Field plantings are part of the state plant materials program and are used to determine which new plants or cultural techniques work in solving conservation problems in a given local area. Field plantings can be an adaptation planting to document a plant release. The PMC can usually provide small quantities of seed. An example of a field planting would be to demonstrate and compare different cover crop plants used in an orchard.

Prepared by David A. Dyer, Manager, Lockeford Plant Materials Center, Lockeford, California

Conservation Field Trials (CFT) are 3 to 5 year detailed field studies to examine the adequacy or adaptability of a conservation practice, procedure or material for solving local soil, water or related resource problems, and may or may not use plant materials. A group of landowners work with the Resource Conservation District and field office staff to request and develop a Conservation Field Trial. An example would be evaluating different plant management methods.

Landowners work with RCD's to identify local plant science problems and needs. This information is used to develop the PMC long range plan and annual plan of operations and the California field planting plan. An example is the Lockeford PMC growing plants for the Westside RCD agroforestry program. This included an advanced evaluation of many different plants.

A non-traditional way we can serve the public is to invite American Indians to the Plant Materials Center to promote California Indian basket weavers and to allow the growing of vegetative materials and tending of plants. The PMC could study how to grow and manage basket plant materials. Also, limited resource farmers are assisted by supplying field planting seed and technical assistance in establishment and management of sustainable practices. This would include adapting conventional large farm techniques to match small farm methods.

- **Other items available:**
- Uses, establishment and maintenance of conservation plant species (plant fact sheets).
- Information on where to obtain conservation plants.
- Conservation plant materials developed and released by our program.
- Publications and literature on the use of plant releases, the development of new or improved techniques and information on native plants
- Review of projects and related consulting information.
- Website information at: http://Plant-Materials.nrcs.usda.gov.
- Education assistance and PMC tours.
- Seed cleaning and collection information.
- Plant identification and propagation information.

PLANT MATERIALS PROGRAM CONTACTS

USDA-NRCS
P.O. Box 68
21001 North Elliott Road
Lockeford, CA. 95237
209-727-5319 David A. Dyer, Manager/Agronomist/Soil Scientist
209-727-3205
David.Dyer@ca.usda.gov
209-727-5923 FAX
209-727-3129 Tish Espinosa, Plant Resource Specialist/Agronomist
Tish.Espinosa@ca.usda.gov