

Harvesting Bent Seed

Golf clubs purchase most of their turf seed from retail dealers and are naturally primarily interested in the price, purity, and germination of the particular seeds which they purchase. In recent years there have been many claims as to certain superior qualities of grass seed, particularly bent, produced in different regions. Many of these claims have not been substantiated by results obtained, but they have nevertheless stimulated greater interest in the subject of where grass seed comes from. Believing that our readers will be more and more interested in the sources of some of the seed they purchase, we are publishing in this and the following number of the Bulletin several articles written by agricultural specialists who are personally acquainted with seed production in the principal centers where golf course seeds are harvested. There is much interesting information covering the grass seed industry brought out in these two numbers of the Bulletin, and this information should serve to acquaint those who purchase seed for golf clubs with the various problems that growers and dealers have to face in securing seeds which meet certain standards. Even a casual understanding of the methods used in producing seed enables the purchaser to deal with his seedsman more intelligently and may help him to avoid some of the costly mistakes that are so commonly made in buying seed of any kind.

The common golf course grass seeds are produced in relatively few regions. An unfavorable season or two in a comparatively small section of the country may therefore not only materially reduce the total available stock of seed but may noticeably affect the quality of practically all the seed on the market. Such an unfavorable period may seriously affect the prices as soon as the surplus stock of old crops is exhausted. This dependence on weather conditions largely explains why one new course may be planted with a poor quality of seed for which the club was obliged to pay a high price, whereas another club a year or so later might secure for its new course a high-grade seed at a relatively low price. Such differences can not in fairness be attributed to activities of the retail seedsman.

A comparison of methods used in bent seed production, as pointed out in this number of the Bulletin, will explain why the purchaser should not expect his seedsman to be able to deliver seed of the same purity and germination from every source. German bent represents a bulking of collections made by many harvesters working in different sections gathering their crop from wild grasses. In contrast to this hand-harvesting of wild grasses is the cultivation, in some seed-producing regions, of single species of bent and the systematic inspection and rogueing of fields to keep out unwanted species. This latter method enables the producer and dealer to deliver a more uniform product than is possible by the other method; and if any irregularities appear in such seed supplies they may safely be attributed to deliberate deception or to ignorance on the part of the grower himself or someone along the customary long route between the grower of the seed and the golf course.

Most golf club officials are more interested in the different sources of seed of the bent grasses than of the other seed used on courses. This greater interest may be explained as partly due to the higher price paid for seed of bents and partly to the more intensive sales

efforts used to dispose of this seed to golf clubs. Because of this wider interest in bent seed we are devoting an entire number of the Bulletin to the subject of bent seed production. The seed of other grasses used on golf courses will be considered in the following number.

There are five principal bent-seed producing regions in the world and the methods used in harvesting seed in four of these regions are described in this number of the Bulletin. The fifth region, which is not reported on here, is New Zealand, from which large quantities of colonial bent seed, with a high percentage of purity and germination, are imported into the United States. The descriptions of the methods used in the four bent-seed producing regions, however, bring out the variety of methods which range from hand-harvesting to the highly developed machine-harvesting and threshing by means of the combine. It is well to compare the methods used in harvesting bent seed with those used in the production of the closely related but much cheaper seed of redbtop.

Oregon Bent Grass Seed Certification

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The identification of the seeds of the bent grasses has always been a problem. It has become acute with the strong demand for seed and the consequent temptation to adulterate that has developed with the higher prices. The seeds are so small that examinations with the naked eye are of little use in the identification of the various types and varieties. Such examinations serve only in the detection of the presence of inert matter and foreign seeds.

The first bent grass seed harvested in Oregon as such was threshed in 1924, and our problem of identification came shortly thereafter. When the seed of the Oregon grown seaside creeping bent grass was first placed on the market it was found that seed analysts, including our own analyst at the Oregon Experiment Station laboratory, were identifying it as redbtop. Up until that time, we did not know of the very great similarity between the seed of the two grasses, and it had not been a problem with us. At the request of Lyman Carrier, one of our staff members examined a number of seaside creeping bent fields and drew samples from every sack of seed harvested that year. A composite sample made from all these samples was examined by our analyst and by F. H. Hillman, of the seed laboratory of the United States Department of Agriculture. The composite sample proved satisfactory, and small lots of it were subsequently sent to every seed analyst and to the more important of the seed companies throughout the United States as an official type sample of Oregon grown seaside creeping bent grass seed. With the issuance of these official type samples, seed analysts soon learned to distinguish lots of seaside creeping bent grass seed that were being offered, from lots of redbtop seed, and the immediate problem for the one producer was solved.

Immediately the apparent profit in the bent grass seed crop attracted a number of dealers to Oregon, and it was feared that some of them might be tempted to mix redbtop into the much more expensive bent grass seed and the reputation of the Coos County seaside creeping bent producing district would be jeopardized. Seed certification was discussed in 1925 in order that protection of the industry