

Seedbreeding

Recent developments show its importance for the future says Miranda Harris, marketing and communications manager for DLF Trifolium UK



AN INVESTMENT of seven million Euros in research and development by leading grass seed organisation DLF Trifolium means new material and ideas for turf mixtures are guaranteed on a regular basis. With environmental issues becoming more topical and harder to ignore, the argument in favour of natural turf is becoming more important all the time.

Not only is grass safer and healthier to play on but it is cost effective and has many environmental benefits which are often unrecognised. Grass is a living plant and produces oxygen. It absorbs noise and heat as well as clearing carbon dioxide and dust from the air. Many innovations from leading grass breeders are forthcoming, especially when there is such a large budget devoted to R and D as at DLF.

One innovation which has already caused a great deal of interest, especially amongst the environmentalists is the development of tiny clovers, known as MicroClovers. Once seen as a problem in grass swards, whether for professional or recreational use, clover is now being greeted enthusiastically, as seen in MicroClover Sports Mixture.

Sports turf surfaces are always under a lot of pressure, just like their players but this recent breakthrough in breeding, proven in STRI trials, will please everyone because it ticks both the environmental and performance boxes. Tiny clovers, known as MicroClover, are mixed with high quality turf grasses, which are selected for their slow regrowth, dark colour and disease resistance resulting in a dense and attractive looking sward which is also extremely hardwearing. This is very important, particularly for areas such as the goal mouth where ground cover can be difficult to achieve.

The appearance of a MicroClover turf will be superior to a traditional turf, as the clover weaves its stolons with the grass, spreading evenly and integrating its leaves homogeneously into the grass. The dense growth of this mixture ensures that weeds are crowded out and new ones find it hard to establish. Permanent availability of Nitrogen from the clover feeds the accompanying grasses, adapting to growth habitat and the weather conditions; therefore the turf remains healthy, green and hardwearing, even

during periods of drought. These mixtures are very popular in Denmark as seen in the Aalborg Municipality. "There are fewer weeds in the ground and we have already sown 17 football fields with MicroClover mixtures," says the head of Operational Planning. Back in the UK, orders have been received from Calderdale Metropolitan Borough council in Halifax, Rotherham Metropolitan Borough council in Rotherham and City of Salford council.

As part of the global grass breeding organisation, DLF Trifolium UK has the opportunity to carry out its own grass trials on home grounds with an experienced



Chris Taylor

team headed up by Chris Taylor. Chris has over 30 years of breeding experience with some highly rated amenity varieties included in his portfolio. Now in charge of all trialling activity he is based at Hailes Farm, Didsbrook, near Cheltenham.

Breeding grasses for UK conditions is the main objective for Chris with overall responsibility for 5000 plots within 40 acres of land dedicated to amenity varieties. In order to complement this significant appointment for DLF, new trials facilities including offices and machinery storage at Hailes Farm for the trials and plant breeding department are currently underway and due to be finished next spring.

MicroClover on trial at STRI Bingley





Additional warehousing at its Worcestershire HQ

excellent opportunities for high quality turf mixtures where wear tolerance is key. Pre-Germ has many benefits which positively affect germination and is available on a new mixture called J9 Stadia.

Germination is quicker by up to seven days, and more uniform which means faster establishment and a more consistent emergence pattern respectively, even at lower temperatures or when soil moisture is reduced. Smooth Stalk is strongly rhizomatous and therefore ideal for a more dense, wear tolerant turf. With its strong spring re-growth, it is a natural repairer for damaged turf.

Not only has DLF invested in developing native trial facilities, but they have recently completed the extension of their warehouse facilities by 10,000 square feet. An important element of the new building has been the installation of 'roller racking' which has significantly increased the quantity of finished goods that can be stored.

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Another mixture to herald a breakthrough in breeding is All Weather Sports Mixture with turf credentials proven in independent trials. It combines ryegrass, smooth stalked meadow grass and new turf type tall fescue which has been purpose bred for the amenity market to produce a dense but very fine turf which benefits from a strong root system binding the root zone. Recovery rates are high too. This mixture is great for those looking for good appearance and the ability to cope well under stress conditions including water logged areas as well as long term drought.

The increasing importance of using turf type Perennial Ryegrass has been reflected with the new table in the BSPB Turfgrass Seed Booklet which means greenkeepers and groundsmen can incorporate advanced cultivars of Perennial Ryegrass into their mixtures. The new 'Close Mown Ryegrass Trial for Greens', cut to 4mm, features cultivars Sauvignon and Jessica as No 1 and 2 respectively.

Taking advantage of these outstanding results, Johnsons Sports Seed has included both Sauvignon and Jessica cultivars within its 2008 range in Taskmaster and Ryemaster mixtures. Ryemaster combines the two high flyers with Evita Perennial Ryegrass, which has been tried and tested at many top UK county cricket venues including The Oval.

Finally, a new priming technology Pre-Germ which is used on Smooth Stalk Meadow Grass offers