

MSU Licenses Grass Variety for Commercial Sales

By Bob Ratliff

Mississippi golfers, especially those who play some of the state's smaller courses, may soon tee off on bermudagrass that is the product of university research.

While not a new variety, MS-Express was just recently licensed to a local sod producer by Mississippi State University for commercial production and sales.

"MS-Express came out of the turfgrass research program in MSU's Department of Plant and Soil Sciences about 10 years ago," said Wayne Philley, an MSU research associate and one of the developers of the grass variety. "It has characteristics that make it suitable for use on residential lawns, sports fields and golf courses."

The variety has good pest and disease resistance and does well in high-traffic areas. It turns green and starts growth earlier in the spring than other bermudagrass cultivars and does not slow down when temperatures reach 100 degrees Fahrenheit. Demand for a bermudagrass with those attributes, especially by smaller golf courses, helped lead to the commercialization of MS-Express by MSU.

"Its characteristics make MS-Express a good choice for golf course tees and fairways," Philley said. "It also can be used on the greens of courses where the high maintenance cost of other varieties is a concern."

The variety does well when kept mowed to a height of three-

sixteenths to one inch. Some courses use cultivars on their greens that will tolerate mowing to a height of just one-eighth inch, but Philley said that can be too costly for small courses.

"Maintaining grass at that height can be very expensive," he said. "The ultra-dwarf varieties require additional fungicide and cultivation treatments that some golf courses just can't afford."

MS-Express is licensed to Diamond S Farms in Maben. Owner Wallace Sansing said he is optimistic the variety will be beneficial for golf course managers and others looking for high quality and economical maintenance.

"We're excited about having a bermudagrass that is fine enough for use on golf greens and also hardy enough for high-traffic areas," he said. "Supplies will be available in spring 2006."

MS-Express is one of four turf bermudagrasses from MSU research to be patented and licensed. The first, MS-Choice, is currently marketed under the name Bull's-Eye and used on university and professional sports fields nationwide.

Additional information on Mississippi State University licensed products is available by contacting Charles Rivenburgh, director of the Office of Intellectual Property and Technology, at (662) 325-3521.

