

LONG-TERM RESEARCH FOR LONG-TERM GAINS

Once you realise that the development of any new grass type takes around 15 years, you start to appreciate the effort that grass seed suppliers put into providing the sports turf industry with products that are truly fit for purpose



The new grass cultivars gradually progress from the greenhouses onto open plots (bottom)



By Colin Hoskins
Features editor

A visit to Rigby Taylor's research station at Les Alleuds in France's Loire Valley is an eye-opener for anyone interested in sports grass.

Jayne Leyland, grass seed and line marking product manager, explains that the station team plants 15,000 new varieties every other year. It takes 15 years for a new variety to reach the market so that means around 90,000 grass seed types are being assimilated and scored at any one time.

The fine-tuned process in France – which begins in greenhouses then, as the plants are selected and gradually thinned out, on outdoor trial plots – results in new cultivars that must conform to DUS (distinct, uniform and stable) protocols before they reach the National List.

Rigby Taylor grass is assimilated and selected based on a number of main characteristics:

- Fast establishment
- High wear performance
- Good wear recovery
- Mowing response
- Disease tolerance
- Drought tolerance
- Texture and colour.



"Disease and drought tolerance are increasingly becoming more important," says Jayne, "as legislation limits the types of chemicals we can use and climate change affects irrigation demands."

She adds: "Because diploids have effectively reached a plateau in terms of shoot density and fineness of leaf, for example, it is clear that tetraploid perennial rye grasses have an enormous future."

Two new cultivars were progressing through the selection process at Les Alleuds and a new tall fescue, excellent for drought tolerance and deep rooting, is expected to hit the market in 2018.

Diploid perennial rye grasses have two paired sets of chromosomes within each cell. Tetraploids have four and it is this doubling of chromosome sets that gives them such a great future. The benefits include:

- Double the chlorophyll (compared to diploids)
- High vigour for fast establishment
- Deeper, denser rooting
- Superior disease and drought tolerance (25 per cent reduction in required irrigation)
- Superb colour
- Extremely hardwearing
- Good shoot recovery and growth in cooler temperatures.

"Tetraploids are being well received across the amenity and sports turf sector," says Jayne. "Blended with diploid rye grasses or mixed with fescues, they are performing well on football and cricket pitches, on racecourses and on golf courses, for example."

[i] For more information visit
www.rigbytaylor.com