

# La Semilla

A Newsletter from the Tucson Plant Materials Center

Summer 2007

## NEWSLETTER FOR THE PMC



As you'll see, we've been keeping far too busy to take the time to periodically send you a newsletter. OK, we realize that is not a good excuse. We'll just jump to the important stuff—the changes we're really excited about. We have a mostly new staff since our last newsletter—4 hardworking individuals who have helped change the face and direction of the Center—Leslie, Megan, Jace and Heather—student interns who have joined us “old folks”. Leslie and Megan graduated in May and Leslie has stayed on as a tech. Heather joined us in January and has become one of the gang. We consider ourselves lucky to work with these guys, as they are making huge contributions that help us meet your plant material needs.

Ramona and Mary

### TPMC Grass Releases

'Loetta'  
Arizona cottontop

Saltillo germplasm  
Cane bluestem

'Stevan'  
Plains bristlegrass

Cochise germplasm  
Spike dropseed

**N E W 2006!** Pima  
germplasm Whiplash  
pappusgrass

**N E W 2006!** Vegas  
germplasm Alkali  
sacaton

**N E W 2007!**  
Moapa germplasm  
Alkali muhly

## Farm Developments

When you come for a visit you may recognize some dramatic changes to the farm. Cover has increased 64% since 2005—We reached 77% total coverage of the farm this winter. This summer we expect to add another 9%. The remaining 15% of fields are currently fallow,

due to either ongoing weed management, uneven fields, a lack of water— or most often a combination of the three.

*Lack of water?* While the center was happily increasing in production, the well—drilled back in 1934 when Tucson's population

was 3% its current size— has suffered. We are scheduled to receive a new, deeper, well in July (hopefully coinciding with summer monsoons).

The increase in activity at the Center is in large part due to the ingenuity, enthusiasm and hard work of our current Farm Manager, Jace Householder, who is really a student intern, working only 20 hours a week during the school season.



'Sonora' Black grama, Pima germplasm Whiplash pappusgrass and Cochise germplasm Spike dropseed fill Field 4.

## Five Populations Established for Southeast Arizona

Five conservation species were selected for the development of releases targeted for Arizona's prized grassland region, Southeastern Arizona Basin and Range (Major Land Resource Area 41). Plains lovegrass (*Eragrostis intermedia*), Desert zinnia (*Zinnia acerosa*), Tobosa (*Pleuraphis mutica*) and Bush muhly

(*Muhlenbergia porteri*) are not available commercially. Only Sideoats grama (*Bouteloua curtipendula*), a primary component of this region's grasslands, is commercially available as unique cultivars. But they are not adapted to this region.

In order to increase diversity and regional adaptation, between 12 and 30 collections were made across MLRA 41 for each of the 5 population developments.

All fields were planted during

Sideoats grama and Plains lovegrass populations from MLRA 41 thrive in Tucson's June heat (left); Desert zinnia field will be redesigned to improve harvesting.

2006, and are currently growing vigorously. Sideoats grama, Plains lovegrass and Desert zinnia were harvested last fall, and Tobosa has been harvested once this year already. We look forward to harvesting sufficient seed to begin field testing in the coming years. Desert zinnia, the only forb in the bunch, may require some special attention, as our field design and harvesting equipment are specific to grasses. We will compare two new field designs to test improved harvest techniques for Zinnia. Stay tuned as these species are released and available for purchase...



**Make sure your area gets represented in these releases!**

- Big galleta
- Rothrock grama
- Vine Mesquite
- Curly mesquite
- Tanglehead
- Desert marigold

*Please contact us with questions about making seed collections.*

Let us know about additional important conservation species in your area.



## Native Plant Propagation Workshop

While visiting the Center, a member of the Maricopa County Master Gardeners immediately thought to bring her whole group for a tour. She also had the idea to in-

vite neighboring Pima County Master Gardeners to join in, network and learn about each other's programs.

We decided to take it another step and host a workshop to promote the use of native plants to those most interested in growing plants. We talked about soil mixes, pot types, seeding requirements, and let them take their flats

of plants home. We also gave them a tour of the Center, of course. We recognize the value of urban programs like the Master Gardeners in promoting our Center, our values and our releases for use in urban landscapes.

Ramona oversees Master Gardeners pack in atop (native seed) hay bales for a tour of the Center (left); Mary takes a peak at Pam Perry's choice of plants to take home.



## Native Seed Growers Established in Nevada: Year 2

Perhaps you remember our project with the BLM-Las Vegas Office and High Desert Resources Conservation & Development. The first stage was to develop regionally adapted releases of two spe-

cies, Alkali Sacaton (*Sporobolus airoides*) and Scratchgrass (*Muhlenbergia asperifolia*). NRCS and BLM released Vegas germplasm Alkali sacaton in 2006, followed by Moapa germplasm Scratchgrass this year.

The second stage of the project was to establish local growers in southern Nevada. High Desert RC&D located two farmers in the region interested in native seed production: Moapa School in

the Moapa Valley, an agricultural community along the Muddy River, and Sunrise Acres in Pahrump, to diversify this farm's current melon operation.

This year we established Moapa germplasm scratchgrass at the two locations. We also observed the progress in the Vegas germplasm alkali sacaton fields, which were planted in 2006. Although the 2006 plantings were conducted with little fanfare, this year a large public event was planned at both locations. A representative from Senator Harry Reid's office was in attendance, and presented congratulatory certificates to each farmer.

An unexpected outcome of this project is the learning experience of establishing first-time

native seed growers. Several lessons were learned: 1) first time native seed growers need a lot of assistance, 2) previous farming expertise is crucial, and 3) interest, commitment and perseverance are even more important for success. These lessons will be useful as we continue the process of increasing commercial native seed producers, of which there are too few in our service area. We have provided assistance to these fledgling growers over the past year, and will continue to do so as long as they need us.

The BLM should be able to purchase the first harvest of these species at the end of growing season, and begin to restore diminishing riparian areas in southern Nevada.



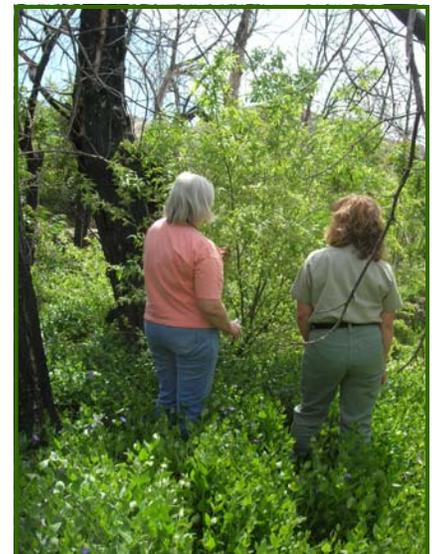
Moapa community members Sherie Moore and Chris Green master the planter (above); public event at Pahrump draws 40 people including Senator Reid's Aide

## Camp Creek Restoration: Homeowners, Weeds and Wildflowers

At the invitation of the Tonto National Forest, we have begun the early stages of a restoration project in the Camp Creek drainage, a riparian jewel north of Cave Creek, Arizona. The area was burned in the catastrophic fire of 2005, which in turn increased Vinca (*Vinca major*) and several other invasive species in the creek's channels and arid slopes. In order to remove

the Vinca without increasing erosion, appropriate native ground cover will be planted in place of the infestation. Following Vinca removal, the Tucson PMC will be working with Tonto Forest, homeowners and volunteers in the area to grow and establish several thousand appropriate native plants as replacements. Seed for the plants will be collected from sources in the area.

Ramona discusses pole plantings with Patti Fenner from Tonto National Forest (right); Verbena (*Glandularia gooddingii*) is one of several species that has recolonized the area since the fire.



**We Are On The Web!!**  
[Http://Plant-Materials.nrcs.usda.gov](http://Plant-Materials.nrcs.usda.gov)

**USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service**

3241 N. Romero Road  
Tucson, Arizona 85705

Phone: 520-292-2999

Fax: 520-292-9099

Email: [Ramona.Garner@az.usda.gov](mailto:Ramona.Garner@az.usda.gov)

[Mary.Hershdorfer@az.usda.gov](mailto:Mary.Hershdorfer@az.usda.gov)



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**USDA – Natural Resources Conservation Service  
Tucson Plant Materials Center**

## What's Happening

- Leslie Wood has joined us for another year – she's here full time since graduating in May with a B.S. in Rangeland Management from the University of Arizona.
- Our friend and colleague Dan Robinett no longer works alongside us at the PMC since retiring. We know we haven't seen the last of him though...
- Jace Householder keeps the farm ship shape (see page 1).
- Heather Dial is our newest edition. With her GIS expertise, she is making all kinds of maps including one of our service area (page 1).

**Jace drives his favorite vehicle (above... and below); Heather and Leslie have too much fun on the planter.**



### Plant Materials Purpose

- Assemble, test, and release plant materials for conservation,
- Determine techniques for successful use and management of conservation species,
- Facilitate the commercial increase of conservation species,
- Provide for the timely development and transfer of effective applied plant science technology to solve conservation problems,
- Promote the use of plant science technology to meet the goals and objectives of the USDA and NRCS Strategic Plans.