

BROOKSVILLE PLANT MATERIALS CENTER: DEVELOPING SOURCES OF NATIVE GRASS SEED FOR REVEGETATION IN FLORIDA

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In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in both the public and private sectors in revegetating areas in Florida with native species. This is in part due to the perception that native species provide better wildlife food and habitat and offer more sustainable management systems due to lower nutrient requirements. Revegetation with native species is now mandated for much of the phosphate minelands in Peninsular Florida. The problem with this effort is that there is a lack of commercial seed sources of native Florida materials. This is in part due to the fact that many native Florida species have poor seed production or require management techniques such as burning to produce viable seed. The USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Brooksville, FL Plant Materials Center (PMC) initiated a cooperative program with the Florida Institute of Phosphate Research (FIPR) in the 1990s to identify accessions of native species with the greatest potential for commercial seed production. Six seed-producing native grasses were identified in preliminary adaptation trials: Eastern gamagrass, lopsided indiagrass, purple bluestem, hairawn muhly, switchgrass, and wiregrass. The current focus of the Brooksville, FL Plant Materials Center is to develop reliable seed producing cultivars or germplasm of these grasses and to facilitate their commercial availability.

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