

plant materials

Fall 2010

By Mike Owsely, Manager, Plant Material Center, Americus

The release of 'Penn Center Germplasm' switchgrass from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Jimmy Carter Plant Material Center commemorates the South



Historical plaque about Penn Center

Carolina community of Penn Center. Penn Center is a significant national historic site recognizing civil rights milestones and efforts of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Penn Center dates back to 1862 when Penn School was established as an experimental



The Penn Center Museum

program to educate Sea Island slaves freed at the beginning of the Civil War. During the 1960's, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and members of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference utilized Penn Center as a training site for retreat and strategic planning. The current mission of Penn Center is to promote and preserve the history and culture of the Gullah people of the South Carolina low country.

Penn Center provides African-American museums, heritage day celebrations, history and cultural programs. 'Penn



Close up of Penn Center Germplasm switchgrass.

Center Germplasm' switchgrass is a native warm-season perennial bunch grass that forms short branching rhizomes. It can grow to four to six feet tall.

David Findley, grazing lands specialist with the NRCS in Columbia, South Carolina discovered this newly released switchgrass in the Penn Center,



David Finley examining Penn Center Germplasm switchgrass.

South Carolina area. It naturally grows with marshhay cordgrass, black needlerush, marsh elder, sea myrtle, cabbage palm, live oak and southern red cedar. This zone is transitioning from the high salt marsh to the maritime forest.



Penn Center switchgrass at the PMC in Americus.

Home and building disturbance is increasing adjacent to high marsh areas with increased tourism and economic development in our coastal areas. This release should fit a niche as a soil conservation and beautification plant in these disturbed sites.

The Jimmy Carter PMC in Americus, Georgia is increasing this switchgrass and a nursery in Moncks Corner, South Carolina is growing material for the commercial market.