

## **.USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service**

### **Notice of Source Identified Plant Release**

#### **Big bluestem**

The USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Elsberry Plant Materials Center, the University of Northern Iowa (UNI), the Iowa County Integrated Roadside Vegetation Management Program (IIRVMP), the Iowa Department of Transportation (IDOT), and the Iowa Crop Improvement Association (ICIA) announce the release of a Source Identified Southern Iowa Germplasm big bluestem, *Andropogon gerardii* Vitman.

The big bluestem has been assigned the NRCS accession number 9068616.

**Origin:** Counties in southern Iowa.

#### **Ecotype Description:**

Big bluestem is a tall, warm-season, perennial, native grass with stiff, erect culms; flattened and keeled sheaths; membranous ligules; and flat or folded leaf blades. Big bluestem has developed a very efficient spreading root system which may reach depths of 5-8 feet (150-200 cm.) in northern latitudes, and 6-8 feet (180-240cm.) or more in the Southern part of its natural range. Although short rhizomes may be present, it usually makes a bunch type growth. Big bluestem is composed of many ecotypes with a wide range of adaptation to soil and climate. Big bluestem is one of the most widespread and important forage grasses of the North American tallgrass prairie region. It is usually associated with one or more of the other three dominant species, indiangrass, (*Sorghastrum nutans* (L) Nash.), switchgrass, (*Panicum virgatum* L.), and little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium* (Michx.) Nash.). Big bluestem occurs on subirrigated lowlands, nearly level to gently undulating glacial till plains, overflow sites, level swales and depressions, residual and glacial uplands, and stream terraces and bottomlands along rivers and tributaries. The abundant, leafy forage is palatable to all classes of livestock.

#### **Management:**

Big bluestem seeds per pound averages 165,000. A seeding rate of ten pounds (10) Pure Live Seed (PLS) per acre for pasture and hay is sufficient. A seeding rate of 3.5 pounds per acre (PLS) in 36 inch rows is sufficient for seed production (40 PLS per linear foot). Seed should be planted 1/4 to 1/2 inch deep in a firm relatively weed free seedbed. Seedling vigor is good and stands are comparatively easy to establish where competition is controlled. Mowing above the height of the big bluestem has been used to reduce competition when seeds begin to severely encroach into the planting.

Plateau herbicide is label for new and established plantings. 2-4D for post-emergence broadleaf sprays have been used during big bluestem establishment.

Seed yields are good and can be harvested with a combine. Estimated yields of 150 to 200 pounds per acre may be harvested on well-managed stands.

For isolation requirements, big bluestem should be spaced a minimum of 1000 feet from any other different big bluestem selection.

**Site Description:**

Big bluestem is adapted to most upland and some bottomland soils. Ecotypes are adapted to areas with as little as 14 inches to over 50 inches of average annual precipitation. The number of collections (40) from Southern Iowa counties guarantee the adaptation of releases to the entire section of Southern Iowa.

Thirty-three collections of big bluestem from twenty-nine southern Iowa guarantee adaptation of releases to the entire zone. Plants are cross-pollinated and hybrids are formed and adapted to the zone of origin.

**Climate:** The average annual temperature is 50 degrees Fahrenheit. July is the warmest month with an average high of 87 degrees and low of 67 degrees. January is the coldest month with an average high of 29 degrees and low of 10 degrees. The average annual precipitation for this region is 31 inches with much of this coming during the growing season. The average frost-free growing period runs from April 28 to October 10.

**Availability of Plant Materials:**

Breeders material is being produced in limited supply by the Plant Materials Center, located in Elsberry, Missouri.

**Release Approved By:**

/s/ Roger A. Hansen, NRCS                      Date: 6/16/99  
Missouri State Conservationist

/s/ Robert D. Koob                              Date: 6/28/99  
President, UNI

/s/ Daryl D. Smith                              Date: 6/17/99  
Program Director, IRVM

/s/ Leroy Brown, NRCS                      Date: 6/18/99  
Iowa State Conservationist

/s/ Robert E. Lawson                      Date: 6/29/99  
Secretary/Treasurer ICIA

/s/ Richard S. White                      Date: 8/10/99  
for: Diane Gelburd  
Director, Ecological Sciences Division  
United States Department of Agriculture  
Natural Resources Conservation Service  
Washington, DC

## References

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