

The NRCS/James E. “Bud” Smith Plant Materials Center-Past and Present

In 1965 the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) established a Plant Materials Center (PMC) near Knox City, Texas, on 60 acres of irrigated farmland leased from Mr. Tom Campbell.



In the early days the Soil Conservation Service operated a network of field nurseries. From 1934 up until about 1953 SCS nurseries were operated much like our modern day Plant Materials Centers. The big task of the nurseries was to provide grass seed critically needed to restore land damaged by the drought and wind erosion of the 1930's

The first major native grass seed harvest in history was made by nursery personnel in late 1935 from prairie rangelands in Texas and eastern New Mexico. More than 50,000 pounds of blue grama seed were harvested with bluegrass seed strippers. From these early efforts plant scientist soon learned that conventional farm combines could be easily modified to harvest many of the desired native plant species. These early developments helped solve the seed supply problem, but it was only a partial solution.

Other problems facing the early SCS technicians included proper seedbed preparation, dates and rates of seeding, and equipment suitable for planting grasses under range and pasture conditions. All of these items were worked out by 1938 and the basic techniques are still in use today with only minor modifications.

As SCS nurseries were phased out in the mid 50's the Plant Materials Program as we know it today came into existence.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)/James E. “Bud” Smith PMC was the first modern day Plant Materials Center established in Texas. Today, there are three Plant Materials Centers serving Texas and parts of adjoining states. Besides Knox City there are centers at East Texas near Nacogdoches and South Texas near Kingsville.

An early figure in the SCS plant science arena was Mr. James E. “Bud” Smith. Mr. Smith was involved in many of the new technologies coming out of the program, and on September 7, 1967 the Knox City PMC was given the honorary name of the James E. “Bud” Smith Plant Materials Center in honor of Mr. Smith's dedicated service in early plant science work from 1935 up until 1965 when he retired.

In 1990 the NRCS/James E. “Bud” Smith PMC land acreage increased on the same property and totaled to 137.5 acres with irrigated farmland and still manages the land today. The PMC is part of a network of 27 Plant Materials Centers located around the United States. This includes one new PMC established in 2004 in Fallon, Nevada.

The primary area of service of the Plant Materials Center near Knox City is central, west and north Texas and southwestern Oklahoma. Each Center serves an area comprising several major land resource area and ecotypes, but it doesn’t stop here. Like all the other Plant Materials Centers in the nation, work being done at the James E. “Bud” Smith PMC is coordinated with that being evaluated at other locations across the country.

Like in the days of the early SCS nurseries questions arise dealing with plants.

Today the modern NRCS Plant Materials Center is an integral part of finding the solution to the problem we face in modern agriculture.



Today droughts, overgrazing, wildlife habitat improvement, water quality improvement, and re-establishment of critical areas are just a few of the issues the NRCS/James E. “Bud” Smith PMC program must deal with.

Since its establishment in 1965 the Center has released on its own or in cooperation with other USDA agencies 30 improved varieties of plants, including many grasses, forbs, legumes, shrubs, and trees. Cooperating with other partners and prior to the establishment of the PMC near Knox City, Texas, NRCS was involved with 7 other conservation plant releases which are also credited to the Plant Materials Program.

As we move into the 21st century working on conservation the NRCS/James E. “Bud Smith PMC will continue to develop new plant releases and plant science technology to provide customers the tools they need to manage their natural resources for conservation use.

For more information contact the NRCS/James E. “Bud’ Smith Plant Materials Center at (940) 658-3922 or visit the Plant Materials Program website in <http://Plant-Materials.nrcs.usda.gov>

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USDA-NRCS/James E. "Bud" Smith PMC

Knox City, Texas

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