

April 2017 Market Update

Weather...one of those safe topics, suitable for discussions with strangers while waiting in line or at the doctor's office. However, in the world of agriculture, weather has a long reach. Here in Oregon, weather and its reach has certainly been a popular topic.

You may recall that the weather in Oregon is one of the reasons why it's the Grass Seed Capitol of the World. Cool rainy winters and hot dry summers make it the perfect spot to produce seed without the added expense of irrigation and drying sheds. In October, the rains begin with an average of about 3 inches for the month and increase steadily thru the winter followed by a gradual descent in spring until, finally, a dry summer begins. And not a deluge either, with an average rainfall of 42 inches a year! This year has been a record breaker. That 3 inches in October, well, this year it's reported in excess of 10 inches for that month alone and in March, we've hit our 42 inches with Summer not here yet.

Of course, this is a detractor for tourism but let's get back to that reach and how it translates in the grass seed industry.

EXCESSIVE RAIN:

- Prevents planting of new fields. The crop primarily affected by it this year is perennial ryegrass, one of the last crops to go in and be assured of a harvest the following fall. No increase in popular varieties and no introduction of new varieties.
- Prevents effective weed controls. Without the normal breaks in the rain, growers either can't apply or can only expect limited results. So, more contamination in the crop. This results in a higher weed count. The solution may be a more stringent cleaning regime but this can mean a lighter yield and can prove ineffectual in removing some of the contaminants. *Poa* anyone?
- Effects crop yields by loss of plants through flooding or fertility issues.

The potential loss of yield or good quality seed may be even more of a factor when viewed in light of a recent communication issued by the USDA, indicating the reported acres of perennial ryegrass are down by 14% from the previous year and lots of competition for acres from other crops like hazelnuts. Fortunately, we produce perennial ryegrass in other areas like Minnesota and Canada but those crops have never been as dependable as Oregon and have a love-hate affair with weather of their own.

And one more caveat, the rain has been accompanied by lower degree days than on average. This can indicate a later harvest. Following a year of short crops, this can mean delays in shipping in a season of peak demand for many species. The saying here in Oregon is that "short crops have long tails".

So, a silver lining in all these clouds? Simple – plan ahead and let Seed Research of Oregon help you navigate these watery pitfalls. As you know, Seed Research produces some of the top performing perennial ryegrasses like Sideways, SR 4650 and, dare I say it, the perennially popular SR 4600 - still spreading and out-showing newer varieties. Seed Research of Oregon, with its roots in golf and the strict quality demands of that industry, brings the same exacting requirements to all its offerings. This is particularly important when the weather threatens to flood us with lower quality seed. Now is the time to look at your inventories and to bring in seed so that you have the quality and variety of offerings needed for a successful fall.

It's a good time to look at all your needs for the upcoming fall. The rain is falling on all the crops so with light inventories on fine fescues, KY bluegrass and some varieties of creeping bentgrass, this is a good time to talk with your SRO rep about your needs for next season.