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Clippings

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Growing Better Featured Topic:

Can H2A Work for Sod Farms?

A booming economy and thorny political issues have made it tough to find workers, leading some Florida sod farms to reconsider whether the H2A guest worker program - long considered too complex and expensive for most operations-might help them get the employees they need.

In 2018, the U. S. Department of Labor reported over 240,000 certified positions under the H2A program, representing roughly 10% of the total number of hired workers on US farms, according to Veronica Nigh, an economist with the American Farm Bureau Federation. This number was 21% higher than 2017, and has more than doubled over the past five years. And while H2A employees have generally been used for work such as harvesting and planting, Nigh noted that guest workers in some states are performing a wide range of duties, from operating equipment to constructing livestock structures.

At this year's TPF Growing Better Annual Meeting lunch on Friday, April 26, a panel of three of experts will share the nuts of bolts of the program, how it's evolving, and whether the red tape and regulations are worth the effort.

Andrew M. Jackson is a North Carolina attorney specializing in helping agricultural



Andrew Jackson

operations obtain work visas for their seasonal employees.

With more than 10 years experience, Andy has a proven track record of bringing in thousands

of H-2A workers each year for clients in nine states. He'll be joined by Florida attorney David Carlton and Judy Strickland, who assisted a southwest Florida citrus operation with compliance for over 20 years.

The TPF Annual Meeting lunch begins at noon and is included with All-Friday Events registration. Find information and register for this and other Growing Better events at www.floridaturf.com/events.

Growing Better: The 2019 TPF Annual Meeting & Show

Thursday, April 25, 2019

Clay Shoot | Reception & Dinner

Friday, April 26, 2019

Trade Show | Seminars | Annual Meeting Lunch

Quail Creek Plantation

Okeechobee, Florida

Register by April 19 at

www.floridaturf.com/events

Details
inside!

USDA Grant Supports Continued Work on Mixed-Cultivar Lawns

Adam G. Dale, PhD, UF | IFAS Department of Entomology

Urban landscapes are frequently characterized by reduced arthropod diversity and increased insect pest abundance, which reduces ecosystem services provided by urban plants and wildlife.

Warm season turfgrasses are ubiquitous to southern landscapes where, when healthy, they provide many benefits to humans and the environment. Unfortunately, insect pests frequently reduce these benefits. Due to few effective or practical IPM tactics, warm season lawn managers rely on insecticides for pest control, which is expensive and has unintended consequences. Evidence from agricultural and natural systems suggests that increasing plant cultivar diversity can reduce pests, promote biological control, and improve plant quality. Therefore, increasing turfgrass cultivar diversity may increase plant quality and arthropod diversity, while reducing plant pests and their associated maintenance costs and risks.

UF/IFAS Assistant Professor Dr. Adam Dale, in collaboration with Drs. J. Bryan Unruh, Susana Milla-Lewis (NCSU), and Basil Iannone, were recently awarded a USDA-NIFA-Crop Protection and Pest Management grant for \$325,000 to conduct research on the effects of mixing St. Augustinegrass cultivars on insect pests and turfgrass quality. This new project continues research led by Dale's program over the past two years in north-central Florida. So far, Dr. Dale has found evidence that there may be benefits associated with mixing St. Augustinegrass cultivars in the same turf planting.

For example, he has found that caterpillar pests like fall armyworm preferentially infest single-cultivar plantings over mixed-cultivar plantings and also feed less in mixed compared to single cultivar plantings. Other insect pests like southern chinch bug also appear to become more abundant in single-cultivar compared to mixed-cultivar plantings. Finally, two years of data suggest that mixed-cultivar plantings grow into denser, greener stands of turf that professionals and the public perceive as equal or better quality compared to St. Augustinegrass monocultures.

Although the first couple years of data show promising results, it is important to recognize that plants and insects change their behavior and interactions over time and in different climates or geographic regions. Time is important since turfgrasses are a perennial crop that, when healthy, remain in a lawn for many years. Geographic location is also important, particularly in Florida where there are multiple climatic regions with different environmental conditions. Under these different conditions, we may find different or



Graduate student Briana Whitman shared information on mixed-cultivar plot work at the 2017 North Central Florida Turfgrass Field Day in Citra.

varying effects of mixed-cultivar plantings on turfgrass quality and insects.

To address these uncertainties, Dr. Dale and the team will use this recent USDA award to create experimental field plots in Ft. Lauderdale, Citra, and Milton, FL as well as in North Carolina. Over the next four years, they will closely monitor and measure the effects of mixed-cultivar plantings on turfgrass health and pest and beneficial insects. The ultimate goal of this work is to develop more sustainable IPM practices that sod growers, turfgrass professionals, and homeowners can implement to improve turfgrass quality and reduce the management inputs often necessary to produce and maintain a high quality stand of turfgrass.

Update: Lethal Viral Necrosis in St. Augustine

(Continued from page 6)

Yes, no changes. Landscapers, lawn maintenance personnel and sod farms who renovate and/or install should be aware of the symptoms of the disease and be diligent in identifying potentially affected areas. When working in affected areas, follow good practices to avoid spreading the virus:

- Landscapers and lawn maintenance crews should clean equipment such as mowers and weed eaters regularly, and between yards whenever possible (this is a very likely source of spread lawn to lawn);
- Replace Floratam in affected lawns with other turf types;
- Growers who also renovate (ripping out old material) and install should use caution when bringing materials back to farms. Clean equipment thoroughly to prevent spread to production fields.

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