



Natural Resources Conservation Service
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News Release

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Alkali Muhly To Be Released In 2005

ALBUQUERQUE, NM-Alkali muhly, sometimes called scratchgrass, (*Muhlenbergia asprifolia*) will be released to commercial seed producers in 2005 by the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Los Lunas Plant Materials Center. It has been developed for the riparian zones in New Mexico where extensive clearing of salt cedar and other invasive exotics has recently occurred.

“Alkali muhly is an excellent soil stabilizer since it is strongly rhizomatous,” said Dave Dreesen, Plant Materials Center agronomist. “That is, it spreads vegetatively by underground stems that extend from the original plant and initiate new plants.”

Alkali muhly grows in moist to wet, sandy to clay and neutral to alkali soils, and is an excellent species for seeding on the flood plain to prevent invasion of salt cedar and other invasive exotic species that tend to encroach on these sites. A thick grass cover will usually reduce seed-to-soil contact which will significantly limit establishment of these species.

The typical habitats for alkali muhly are damp meadows, moist riparian zones, and mesic (moderately moist) disturbed areas often with alkaline and saline soils. Alkali muhly is a perennial grass with an open, finely-branched seed head up to 18 inches tall. The seed used to develop the Plant Materials Center’s selected release was collected in a damp arroyo bottom near the Westwater Spring in San Juan County, New Mexico. Selection for agronomic production potential has resulted from several successive field plantings at the Plant Materials Center.

“The application of this species for riparian restoration on mesic sites with moderate salinity or alkalinity is a certainty,” Dreesen said. “The Plant Materials Center will be investigating the potential range of use of this species on more xeric and saline soils.”

Alkali muhly seed should be commercially available in 2008. Seed will be available from the Plant Materials Center for field evaluation plantings in 2006. Development of alkali muhly has been partially funded by the Department of Interior-Bureau of Reclamation.

For further information about alkali muhly contact the Los Lunas Plant Materials Center at (505)865-4684.

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