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Finding new frontiers on the fairway

Texas A&M, Kansas State work on hybrid grasses for golf courses

By Katherine Garcia @katiegarcia2018 Feb 18, 2018

Texas A&M men's golf assistant coach Brian Kortan said he believes that the new turf grass will improve the game of golf.
Photo by Alyssa Denson

Innovation Zoysia could change a player's golf game. It's not a protein powder or a high-quality club — it's a new breed of turfgrass.

The co-developed turfgrass is characterized as a cold, hardy hybrid, meant for difficult weather conditions for fairways, according to the Dallas Center, an Agrilife extension facility where turfgrass research is currently conducted. Established in 1980, the center has been looking to breed more resource efficient, environmentally friendly varieties of turfgrass, according to their website.

In addition to Innovation Zoysia, also known as KSUZ 0802, the turfgrass breeding program has partnered with corporations to meet the needs of different climates and industries, according to the research facility's website. Sod Solutions, a sod company that researches and patents turfgrasses, partners with universities all over the country, including Texas A&M. Sod Solutions said Innovation Zoysia will have numerous uses as a new development of turfgrass.

"It will be an excellent option for landscapers and end users in the transition zone and beyond who are looking for a Zoysia for yards, parks and commercial establishments," the company said in an online statement. "Golf course superintendents in the transition zone will have access to a great grass that will perform well in their region. Before now, the options were limited to long established varieties."

Ambika Chandra, associate professor of soil and crop sciences, is the principal investigator of the Dallas Turf Breeding Team. She and her have team partnered with Kansas State University's turfgrass researchers through Sod Solutions to develop a more sustainable breed of zoysia grass.

"The idea here was that zoysia grasses in the warm season, they grow during the summer but they go into dormancy during the winter time, and that's when you can go look outside your window and the grass is going to be really brown or dormant," Chandra said. "It's not dead, it's just gone into sleep mode."

Chandra said Innovation Zoysia is meant to survive in the warm and cold climates of the Northern and Southern United States. She said the new breed is also meant for shady areas on golf greens.

"We recently released a variety of grass for golf course putting greens, and this is actually the first hybrid of zoysia grass ever developed for golf course putting-green purposes," Chandra said. "So we're very excited about that, and the reason is zoysia grass requires a lower level of nutrition. It requires less amount of mowing. Overall, it does pretty good in shade."

Reflecting over his many years playing and coaching the game of golf, A&M men's golf assistant coach Brian Kortan said the advancement in turfgrass breeding can be a contributing factor in his players' performance.

"In layman's terms, they spend their day on the grass, so the better the turf, not just aesthetically, but the way it plays and that kind of thing can really affect the way they practice and perform and understand just lots of things about golf," Kortan said.

At the Traditions Club, where A&M men's and women's golf teams practice, the dynamic weather patterns of Texas contribute to a game of golf that differs from other places, according to Kortan.

"We're [enduring] 100 degrees and then we have ice, so it's a different deal here in Texas versus other places," Kortan said. "So just the advancement of turfgrass in general has changed the game a little bit as far as the green complexes and the ability to have good, quality fairways and tee boxes throughout the year."