

Promoting a Florida Seed Source of Splitbeard Bluestem for Use in Longleaf Pine Plantings in the Deep South

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Splitbeard bluestem (*Andropogon ternarius* Michx.) is a native bunch grass that can be found growing on dry, sandy or gravelly soils in the southeastern US. It is generally not a major component of the understory community in southern pine forests within its native range. However, it is known for its ability to effectively colonize disturbed sites. This should make it an ideal candidate for use on longleaf pine (*Pinus palustris* Mill.) restoration sites, especially those with dry soils that are being converted from former cropland or pasture, where other less competitive native understory species may not be capable of establishment from seed. However, limited commercial availability of splitbeard bluestem seed is one factor that hampers its use on these sites. Staff at the USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Brooksville Plant Materials Center (PMC) in Brooksville, Florida recognized this need and collected seed from a population of splitbeard bluestem in Citrus County, Florida in 1995. It was released under the name Fort Cooper Germplasm in 2008. Foundation seed has been distributed to a small number of seed growers; however, we are looking for additional producers that are interested in growing Fort Cooper Germplasm. The PMC also has limited quantities of seed that can be distributed to researchers wishing to plant small demonstration plantings on longleaf pine restoration sites in Florida, Georgia, and Alabama, to field test its establishment potential on these sites and document its range of adaptation. Please contact the author for further information.