**The Big Bluestem Story**

*Developing a big bluestem release*

---

**Collection**

- Collecting vegetative material from a field.
- Setting up fine-mesh wire netting to protect collected material.
- Imprinting harvest site information on collected material.

**Propagation and Assembly**

- Collections are propagated on a small scale.
- Plants are handled to get them ready for propagation to a larger scale.
- Collections are handled in a greenhouse.
- Collections are handled and assembled for various characteristics like forage and seed production.

**Evaluation and Selection**

- Plants are evaluated and selected for various characteristics like forage and seed production.
- Plants are evaluated for winter hardiness, disease resistance, size, form, and color.

**Name and Release**

- A population is selected after rigorous evaluation and testing.
- This population is not a genetically modified organism, but is a selection from a larger population.
- The population can have a broad or narrow genetic makeup.
- The population is given a name, often based on its origin.
- Once named, the population is released to the public for increase and commercial use.
- Releases are either varietal (cultivar) or prevarietal, depending on the amount of time the population has been tested.
- Both types of release can be certified under the seed certification program within a state.

**Seed Increase and Production**

- An increase field is planted at the plant materials center from seed harvested from the breeder's block.
- Foundation seed is distributed to seed growers to increase and distribute commercially.
- Foundation seed is stored in a temperature and humidity-controlled environment until being distributed to commercial seed growers.
- Management of a seed production field includes fertilizing, weed control, burning, irrigation, and disease and insect control.

**Use**

- Seed is harvested by combining.
- Seed is debearded (de-awned) and then cleaned through a fanning mill.
- Native prairie species are used to restore disturbed lands.
- Wildlife uses seeds and forage for food and cover.
- Seed growers produce certified seed for commercial sale.

**Announcement**

- A release notice announcing the release of a population is distributed to researchers and cooperators.
- An information brochure is published and made available to the public through the Plant Materials Center, the website, and NRCS field offices.

**Cooperators**

Cooperators are an important part of the plant release process. These include universities and experiment stations, Agricultural Research Service, state and federal agencies, and local NRCS and conservation districts.

---

**USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.**

**Nancy K. Jensen**

and Rachel H. Bergsagel

USDA-NRCS Plant Materials Center

3308 University Drive

Bismarck, ND 58504