Science Societies

New Orchardgrass Provides High Forage Production with Less Winter Injury

December 5, 2023

The USDA-Yeti orchardgrass selection nursery at Panguitch, UT. Photo by Joseph Robins.

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Perennial forages are a vital part of economically and environmentally sustainable agricultural production. Orchardgrass is a an important cool-season perennial grass that supplies a high quality and animal-preferred feed source in temperate regions of the world. Unfortunately, orchardgrass is susceptible to injury and death from harsh winter conditions that occur at higher latitude or elevation production sites.

Researchers from the USDA in Logan, UT conducted a long-term plant-breeding project to decrease orchardgrass' susceptibility to winter injury. They collected orchardgrass seed from high-elevation locations in central Utah and then used this seed in evaluations of orchardgrass winter injury at a high-elevation location in southern Utah. Through multiple rounds of evaluation, they developed the improved orchardgrass

cultivar ‘USDA Yeti.’ In subsequent field tests at several locations in the Intermountain United States, USDA Yeti suffered 10–30% less winter injury than other U.S. commercial cultivars while maintaining high stands and forage production.

USDA Yeti orchardgrass is a substantial improvement on available U.S. orchardgrass cultivars and will be an important component of forage production in many areas of the Intermountain U.S.

Adapted from Robins, J. G., Jensen, K. B., Buffham, J. R., Bushman, B. S., & Heaton, K. (2023). ‘USDA Yeti’ orchardgrass (*Dactylis glomerata* L.), a new orchardgrass cultivar that combines excellent winterhardiness and agronomic performance. *Journal of Plant Registrations*, *17*, 478–482. https://doi.org/10.1002/plr2.20304
