

Comments on the present activity of Czech specialists in grassland cultivation

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Background Unlike some other countries, there is no officially established forage crop or grassland society in the Czech Republic. This, however, does not mean that activity in this field is lacking. Several institutions are involved in the development of grassland research. These are predominantly: Grassland Commission of the Section of Plant Production of the Czech Academy of Agricultural Science, Forage Crop Commission of the Bohemian-Moravian Union of Plant Breeders, Bohemian-Moravian Association of Plant Breeding and Seed Production and Association of Grass and Clover Seed Growers. Members of these institutions are researchers and breeders of grasses and legumes, university lecturers from departments which deal with these aspects, workers in forage crop seed companies and the general agricultural public.

Uses of grassland As in other European countries, grassland cultivation in the Czech Republic has undergone dramatic changes. Even though grasses and legumes still remain the basis of ruminant nutrition, especially grasses have become popular in non-agricultural uses, i.e. in cultural landscape formation and preservation and in environment protection and improvement. Grasses are widely used in landscape revitalisation and in restoration of localities damaged by anthropogenic activity to its original state. This is certainly reflected both in the composition of the species and their proportions and in professional discussions within the grassland public. Careful attention has recently been given to the impact of the Czech Republic joining the European Union, predominantly in relation to agricultural production, forage crop seed production, environment, and the position of applied agricultural research.

Research organisations Those who take part in this discussion and predominate in running research projects and putting them to use are research and teaching staff from private organisations such as OSEVA PRO s.r.o., the Grassland Research Station Rožnov – Zubří based in Zubří (curator of genetic resources of grasses in the Czech Republic, agronomy of grass growing for seed, utilisation of grasses for power production purposes, etc.), the Forage Crop Research Institute Troubsko Ltd. based in Troubsko (curator of the collection of genetic resources of legumes, legume agronomy and seed production, theoretical principles of breeding etc.), the Grass Ecosystem Research Station Jevíčko (re-seeding and improving the quality of permanent grasslands, forage quality, etc.), the Plant Breeding Station Větrov and Domoradice (subsidiary of OSEVA UNI a. s.), the Plant Breeding Station Hladké Životice and the Plant Breeding Station TAGRO Červený Dvůr s.r.o., specialised in breeding forage and lawn varieties of grasses and leguminous crops. The Forage Crop Departments of the Czech Agricultural University in Prague, the Mendel University of Agriculture and Forestry in Brno and the Faculty of Agriculture in České Budějovice coordinate or staff research projects concerning grassland cultivation. In both agricultural universities research into lawns, their establishment and maintenance has recently been of great importance.

Discussion and exchange of information Where do the interchange of ideas and discussions about new procedures in grassland cultivation take place? At annual sessions of scientific boards of the above-mentioned research institutes, workshops on particular topics organised by the Forage Crop Commission of the Czech Academy of Agricultural Science, annual workshops organised by plant breeders and the annual workshop on grass seed production organised jointly by the Grassland Research Station and the Association of Grass and Clover Seed Growers. The source of information is an almanac *Pícninářské listy*. An increasing role of grassland cultivation is shown by active participation in the annual seminars and seminar proceedings *Trávníky (Lawns)*, published by Bonus agency. The importance of the role of grasslands can also be seen in books published this year on the utilisation of grasses for forage crop and lawn purposes which were the outcome of cooperation of the staff of research institutes and universities.

Czech grassland growers do not, however, have any umbrella organisation, but they actively present the results of mainly applied research into forage crop and grassland production, at home and abroad and disseminate the information among Czech users involved in agriculture and in other areas.