

New Genome Research Provides Deeper Insight into Zoysiagrass Breeding

By MURUKARTHICK JAYAKODI, PhD,
& AMBIKA CHANDRA, PhD

Zoysiagrass is becoming more widely used warm-season turfgrasses across the southern United States in lawns, golf courses, sports fields, and public landscapes because of ability to tolerate heat, drought, shade and heavy traffic. Among the many cultivars currently available, 'Palisades' zoysiagrass has become especially popular because of its durability and consistent performance under a wide range of conditions. For sod producers, Palisades offers fast establishment and grow-back characteristics, while turfgrass managers value its adaptability and resilience in challenging environments. While turfgrass professionals typically judge grasses by how they perform in the field, scientists are increasingly focused on understanding the genetics that drive those characteristics. Traits such as drought tolerance, growth rate, disease resistance, and stress recovery all originate from the plant's DNA. However, uncovering those genetic mechanisms in zoysiagrass has not always been straightforward. The species possesses a complex genome structure, and its high level of genetic diversity has historically made it difficult to assemble an accurate genetic reference. Recent advances in DNA sequencing technology are now helping researchers overcome these challenges. In a new study, scientists generated one of

the most complete genome assemblies yet produced for *Zoysia japonica*, cultivar Palisades. The resulting genome provides a detailed view of the plant's genetic blueprint and reveals an unexpected level of diversity hidden within a single plant. This information not only advances scientific understanding of zoysiagrass biology but also provides valuable tools that could accelerate breeding and improvement of turfgrass cultivars in the future.



Although the genome of zoysiagrass is relatively compact (350Mb) compared with many other plant species (over 1 Gb), its genetic structure is surprisingly complex. Zoysiagrass contains multiple sets of chromosomes inherited from different ancestral species. In addition, the grass reproduces through cross-pollination, which increases genetic variation within populations. These characteristics contribute to the wide range of traits observed across zoysiagrass cultivars but also make the species challenging to study genetically.

Earlier genome assemblies often simplified this complexity by combining multiple chromosome copies into a single sequence. While this approach produced useful reference genomes, it also masked important genetic differences. In reality, many turfgrass species including zoysiagrass carry multiple versions of their chromosomes, each containing slightly different genetic information. When

(See **BETTER**, PAGE 10)



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BRENT BATCHELOR
Executive Director

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Email: brent@texasgrass.com

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TEXAS WEATHER OUTLOOK: *March–August 2026*

DR. JOHN NIELSEN-GAMMON

Texas A&M University, Office of the State Climatologist



Texas is heading into spring and early summer with two dominant climate signals: a strong tilt toward above-normal temperatures and limited confidence in widespread, drought-busting rainfall—particularly in regions already experiencing dryness. The primary large-scale driver, La Niña, is weakening, and federal forecasters expect a transition to ENSO-neutral conditions this spring. When ENSO shifts to neutral, seasonal patterns tend to lose some predictability, increasing variability in week-to-week weather.

The Climate Prediction Center (CPC) indicates that La Niña conditions are present but are likely to transition to ENSO-neutral during the February–April period, with neutral conditions expected to persist through much of summer. While there is some potential for El Niño development later in 2026, forecast uncertainty increases significantly through the spring predictability barrier, limiting confidence in late-summer projections.

For the March–April–May period, CPC’s long-range outlook favors above-normal temperatures across the southern and central Plains, including most of Texas. That warm signal is expected to expand northward into early summer, with June–July–August outlooks also favoring above-normal temperatures statewide. Even during weeks with near-normal rainfall, warmer conditions increase evaporation rates, accelerating soil moisture loss and raising irrigation demand.

Precipitation outlooks show enhanced odds of below-normal rainfall across parts of the southern Plains during the spring season. While probabilities are not extreme, the signal leans dry for portions of West, Central, and South Texas. In neutral ENSO conditions, precipitation variability typically increases, meaning localized heavy rainfall events remain possible—but widespread, sustained soaking patterns are not strongly favored in current outlook guidance.

The Seasonal Drought Outlook further reinforces this risk profile. Federal drought forecasters indicate drought persistence and potential development across portions of the Southern Great Plains due to the combination of forecast warmth and below-normal precipitation tendencies. Where soil moisture deficits already exist, elevated temperatures can intensify drought impacts even if rainfall totals are near average.

Practical implications for the next six months include increased municipal and agricultural water demand, elevated wildfire risk during windy periods, and potential stress on rangeland and dryland crops. Heat tends to be the highest-confidence component of seasonal forecasts, and current guidance consistently favors warmer-than-normal conditions across Texas through late summer.

In summary, Texas is likely to experience a warm-leaning spring transitioning into a hot-leaning early summer, with no strong signal for above-normal rainfall statewide. Drought persistence remains a concern in vulnerable regions. Planning assumptions should account for elevated temperatures and faster soil drying, even in scenarios where rainfall totals approach seasonal averages. integration. Yet if you’re one of the landscape companies that have been wary about whether this technology can really help you and provide savings for your organization, you’re not alone.

“If current trends continue, Texans will face more intense and frequent heat waves, more erratic rainfall, and an increasing fire risk in certain areas of the state.” — Dr. John Nielsen-Gammon

forecasters indicate drought persistence and potential development across portions of the Southern Great Plains due to the combination of forecast warmth and

HARNESSING THE POWER OF GENERATIVE AI:

A Comprehensive Guide

AI has become ubiquitous and almost every form of software now offers some type of internal AI integration. Yet if you're one of the landscape companies that have been wary about whether this technology can really help you and provide savings for your organization, you're not alone.

According to the [Microsoft Work Trend Index Report](#), currently only 41% of business leaders expect to redesign business processes from the ground up with AI in mind over the next five years.

Yet 78% of AI users already bring their own AI tools to work, and this is even more common in small- to medium-sized companies. Of these individuals, 53% fear that using AI for important tasks will make them look replaceable.

However, when landscape leaders fail to implement strategic AI use at scale, it puts company data at risk. Rather than having employees hide their AI usage, work to educate everyone on staff on how to effectively and safely utilize this technology.

Carolyn Humpherys, learning and change management consultant with [Alterity Solutions & Traveling Coaches](#), shares some of the fundamentals of generative AI as well as how to practically calculate the ROI of AI.

ELEMENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE PROMPT

Unlike search engines, AI needs more direct prompts compared to a search query you'd use in Google to find the answers you need. Humpherys says effective prompts should have a goal, context, source and expectations.

Consider what you want the AI platform to do, why you need it and who is involved, what data you need it to use and how you want it to respond.

One framework you can utilize to craft effective prompts is following RISEN:

- **R** – Role – Give AI a role to play, such as “Act like a property manager.”
- **I** – Instructions – Be specific in what you tell the AI to do. For instance, “Identify property improvements and their potential impact on customer satisfaction.”
- **S** – Steps – Talk to AI like a human and keep it simple by telling it what order to do things



in, like “Analyze current customer feedback, then identify areas for improvement.”

- **E** – End Goal – Tell AI your desired outcome and format. This could be in a table, bullet points or a tiered list.
- **N** – Narrowing – Provide constraints so the AI doesn't give you a broad, generic answer. Ex. “Focus on urgent changes, not planned upgrades.”

A prompt that utilizes this framework would look something like this:

Act like a small to medium enterprise and a property manager.

- Develop a customer retention strategy for XYZ property.
- Follow these steps:
 - 1) Analyze current customer feedback;
 - 2) Identify key areas for improvement;
 - 3) Propose actionable steps to enhance customer satisfaction.
- Present the strategy in a report format.
- Include at least three specific initiatives.

If an AI platform doesn't give you the response you're looking for or it takes some fine-tuning, such as asking it to be more concise or revise its response to include additional information, you can save yourself additional time in the future by asking it to “Write a prompt that gets me to this point in one prompt.”

Another way to refine the responses you receive is to apply personas or practice scenarios such as “my audience is X” or “Let's role-play a tough conversation. You be the manager, and I'll be the

(See AI, Page 16)

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The K-Shaped Economy and Its Impact on the Turfgrass Industry

The term “K-shaped economy” describes a period of uneven economic performance in which one segment of the economy expands while another contracts or stagnates. The pattern resembles the letter K: one line trending upward, the other downward. This divergence became widely discussed following the 2020 pandemic recovery but continues to describe structural differences in income growth, capital access, and sector performance.

In a K-shaped cycle, asset owners and well-capitalized firms often benefit from rising equity and property values, while wage-dependent households and smaller businesses face greater pressure from inflation, borrowing costs, and slower demand. Access to capital, technology adoption, and balance sheet strength frequently determine which side of the “K” an organization occupies.

For the turfgrass industry, this divergence creates both risk and opportunity.

Residential demand often splits along income lines. Higher-income homeowners typically continue investing in premium landscaping, irrigation upgrades, and specialty sod varieties. Budget-constrained households may delay full lawn replacement, reduce discretionary landscaping, or opt for lower-cost alternatives. This can result in stable or growing premium product demand while commodity-grade segments experience margin pressure.

New construction trends also reflect divergence. If higher-end custom home building remains resilient while entry-level development slows due to financing constraints, turf demand will concentrate in master-planned communities and growth corridors with strong household incomes. Geographic performance may vary significantly across regions depending on job growth and migration patterns.

Commercial and municipal spending may also split. Cities with strong tax bases may maintain park development and athletic field upgrades, while budget-constrained municipalities defer capital projects. School districts and recreational

facilities in higher-income areas may continue renovation cycles, supporting sod demand, while others extend maintenance schedules.

In higher-rate environments, uneven demand and rising input costs can accelerate industry consolidation. Well-capitalized turf producers may expand acreage, secure long-term supply agreements, or acquire distressed competitors. Working operators with limited working capital may struggle with fuel, fertilizer, labor, and financing costs during periods of inconsistent order flow.

Strategically, turfgrass operators should focus on segmentation and financial discipline. Understanding which customer segments represent the upward leg of the “K”—premium builders, high-income residential contractors, or well-funded municipalities—allows operators to prioritize margin-protected relationships. Competing solely on price in weakening segments can erode long-term viability.

Liquidity management becomes critical in divergent economies. Maintaining healthy cash reserves, managing debt exposure, and securing forward contracts can improve stability during volatile demand cycles. Monitoring leading indicators such as housing permits, municipal bond issuance, property tax growth, and interest rate movements provides forward visibility into sod demand trends.

Ultimately, a K-shaped economy does not signal uniform decline for the turfgrass industry. Instead, it signals polarization. Premium demand can remain durable even as price-sensitive segments weaken. Capital-strong operators may gain share while others retrench. The key is recognizing which side of the divergence your customers occupy and aligning production, pricing, and capital strategy accordingly.

In uneven economic conditions, disciplined segmentation, margin protection, and balance sheet strength determine who benefits from divergence—and who is pressured by it.

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Seeking Texas Sod Farmers for a Paid Research Partnership

A PhD student from the University of Minnesota is seeking interest from 5–10 sod farmers along the Texas coast who would be interested in participating in a paid research study focused on migratory shorebirds and working sod farms. Participating farms would allow the student and a small field crew to visit their farm for a few mornings during the months of May and August over the next few years to collect data on how migratory shorebirds use sod fields and whether the birds or their insect food sources show signs of exposure to common herbicides or insecticides. Subsequent work will ask interested farmers to test different ways to reduce chemical application during the 2-3 week migration period without sacrificing quality of sod and thereby potentially increasing their profit margins. Participating farmers will be compensated for their time and access to fields.

Additional project details below:

Each spring and fall, thousands of migratory shorebirds stop along the Texas coast to rest and refuel as they migrate between their wintering grounds in Latin America and breeding grounds in the Arctic. Prior field studies indicate sod farms along the Texas coast are especially important stopover habitat for “grassland shorebirds” as they provide reliable, short-stature, irrigated habitat during a critical stopover period: spring when birds after recently crossed the Gulf of America / Mexico and fall when birds are preparing to cross the Gulf.

As part of this study, the student hopes to partner with 5–10 sod farms in the fall of 2026 who would be open to a small field team (3-4 people max) visiting their farm for a few mornings in the months of May and August (timed with spring and fall migration) between 2026 and 2029, though the student is flexible and willing to work with timelines that fit each participating farm if multi-year participation is not preferable. During these visits, the field team would collect insect samples, which serve as a primary food source for shorebirds, and attempt to capture birds to collect blood samples for a better understanding of herbicide and insecticide exposure. For each of these seasonal visits, farmers will be compensated for time spent on and use of their farm.

Beginning in spring 2027, the student hopes to collaborate with interested farmers through a voluntary test plot component. Here, participating farms would work with the student to establish a few small test plots throughout the sod fields – ideally around 500 square feet, although the exact size, shape and setup can be adjusted based on the farmer’s preferences. Within these plots, chemical use would be temporarily altered or eliminated during the 2-3 week migration window in May and August when birds are stopping to rest and gain fat. The research team would then compare insect samples from chemical free plots with samples from the rest of the field that is managed normally to see whether small, well-timed changes in chemical applications influence exposure levels in insects. Because adjusting chemical inputs could potentially affect sod quality, which the team also intends to measure, the project would include additional compensation to the farmers to offset any potential impacts from these plots.

Ultimately, the project aims to answer two key questions: Do migratory shorebirds or the insects they feed on show signs of exposure to common fungicides and pesticides used on Texas sod farms? And if so, could small and well-timed adjustments reduce exposure while maintaining sod quality and farm profitability?

Texas sod farms already play an important role as stopover habitat for migratory birds. By partnering directly with sod producers, this project hopes to better understand that relationship and explore whether small management adjustments could benefit both wildlife and farming operations. Farmer input is especially critical as this will help guide the study design so that it respects real-world farming operations and minimizes disruption to normal practices. **In the long term, we hope to develop specialty markets for “bird-friendly” sod that could potentially increase product value.**

Farmers who are interested in learning more or discussing whether their farm might be a good fit are encouraged to reach out. For more information, please contact **Candace Stenzel** at stenz101@umn.edu.



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Better Genetics Equals Better Varieties

(Continued from Page 1)

those versions are merged together, the resulting genome sequence can hide variation that may influence plant performance.

To address this problem, researchers used advanced sequencing technologies capable of reading long stretches of DNA with extremely high accuracy. By combining long-read sequencing with chromosome mapping techniques, they were able to assemble the genome of Palisades at nearly complete chromosome scale while keeping the two chromosome sets separate. Each set contains 20 chromosomes and approximately 317 million DNA bases, representing two distinct versions of the plant's genetic instructions. In many cases, the chromosomes were assembled nearly from end to end, providing one of the most complete genome references available for a turfgrass species. Separating these two chromosome sets allowed researchers to examine how they differ from one another. What they discovered revealed just how much genetic diversity can exist within a single plant. When the two versions of the genome were compared as shown in **Figure 1**, the

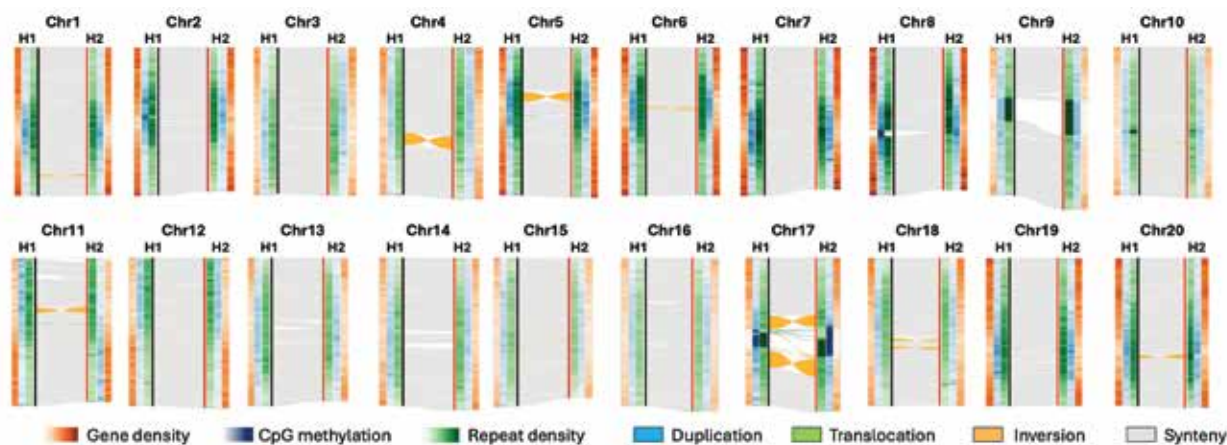


Figure 1, Complete Chromosome pairs of *Z. japonica* showing genetic differences between the two chromosome copies.

researchers identified nearly three million small DNA differences. In addition to these small changes, they also detected hundreds of thousands of larger structural variations where segments of DNA had been inserted, deleted, inverted, or rearranged.

These structural differences are particularly important because they can influence how genes function and how plants respond to environmental stresses. Some of these variations affect the presence or absence of genes, while

others alter the regulatory regions that control gene activity. In total, the researchers identified thousands of genes that were present in only one chromosome set but not the other. Many of these genes were found to be actively expressed in plant tissues such as leaves, roots, stolons, and rhizomes, suggesting that they contribute to important biological functions rather than representing inactive DNA. Another interesting discovery was that even when two genes were genetically identical, they did not always behave the same way. The transcriptional differences between two copies of chromosomes presented in **Figure 2** display cases where one copy of a gene was more strongly expressed than the other, depending on which chromosome set it came from. These differences were often associated with variations in nearby DNA sequences that control gene expression. These regulatory regions act like switches that determine when and how strongly a gene is turned on. Such regulatory differences may help explain how zoysiagrass maintains its adaptability across a wide range of environmental conditions. Having multiple

versions of genes with different levels of activity may allow the plant to respond more effectively to stresses such as drought, heat, or nutrient limitations. This flexibility likely contributes to the strong performance that turf managers

observe in the field.

For plant breeders, the availability of a high-quality genome reference represents a major step forward. Traditional turfgrass breeding relies heavily on field trials and long evaluation periods. Breeders often must grow thousands of plants and observe their performance over multiple seasons before selecting individuals with desirable traits. While this approach has produced many successful cultivars, it – can take years to identify and

(See *GENE* Page 24)

Texas Housing Market Outlook: 2026–2027

Texas enters 2026 with a housing market transitioning from the pandemic-era surge into a normalization phase defined by higher inventory levels, moderated price growth, and slower transaction velocity. Rather than facing supply scarcity, the next 12 months will likely be shaped by affordability, financing conditions, and buyer confidence.

Recent statewide data indicates sales activity softened in late 2025, though year-to-date totals remained relatively stable. Median home prices have held steady near the low-to-mid \$330,000 range, with more transactions clearing through negotiated price reductions rather than sharp headline declines. Sale-to-list ratios have normalized, and days on market have extended compared to the highly competitive conditions seen in 2021–2022.

Inventory levels have improved toward balance, with months of supply moving above the historical three-to-four-month “stable” range. This shift provides buyers with more options and increases competitive pressure on sellers, particularly in price-sensitive segments of the market.

Mortgage rates remain the primary swing factor for demand. The average 30-year fixed rate has eased from last year’s highs but remains near the 6% range. While this is an improvement, rates remain materially higher than the sub-3% era, limiting purchasing power. Industry forecasts suggest rates may hover near current levels through much of 2026, with broader affordability relief more likely in 2027.

Looking ahead over the next 12 months, baseline projections call for modest growth in home sales as financing conditions gradually stabilize. Price appreciation is expected to remain positive but muted, likely in the low-single-digit range statewide. This suggests stabilization rather than rapid acceleration.

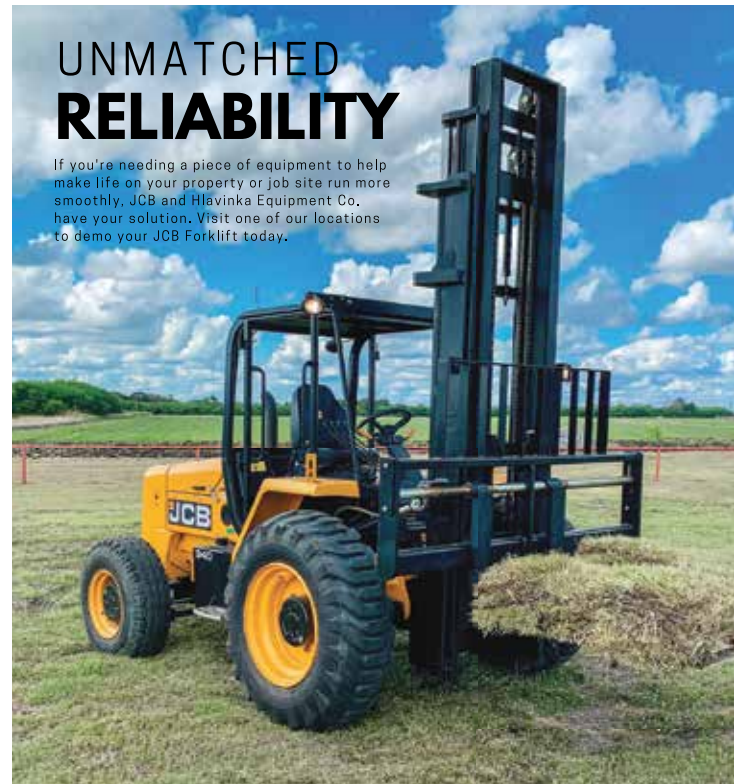
New home construction is expected to post slight gains following last year’s slowdown. Single-family permit activity is projected to rise modestly as builders respond to continued population growth and long-term demographic demand. However, construction activity will remain sensitive to

borrowing costs, labor availability, and lot supply.

Multifamily deliveries are forecast to slow significantly compared to peak construction years, which could gradually firm rental markets over time.

Regionally, performance will vary. Major metro areas with strong job growth and in-migration are likely to outperform smaller or rate-sensitive submarkets. Builders will focus on affordability-driven product, including smaller footprints and incentive-driven financing programs, rather than high-end speculative builds.

In summary, the Texas housing market over the next year is positioned for incremental improvement rather than a rapid rebound. Buyers will benefit from improved inventory and negotiating leverage, while sellers will need to price strategically. New home construction will continue, but growth will be measured and disciplined. The overall outlook suggests a more balanced and sustainable market environment through early 2027.



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How to expand your leadership when managing a team

“*Outside the Lines*” columnist Jennifer Moss of Moss Greenhouses explains how to reframe fear in the greenhouse to avoid limiting beliefs and blind spots in your management style.

BY JENNIFER MOSS,
CEO, MOSS GREENHOUSES

Let’s start with a little honesty: Sometimes the biggest problem in your business is staring back at you in the mirror.

It’s not the economy, the labor market or the weather (though, let’s be real, they all deserve honorable mentions). It’s the quiet, sneaky ways we get in our own way. It’s the stories we tell ourselves that keep us comfortable, safe and stagnant.

They’re called “limiting beliefs” and “blind spots,” and they’re leadership’s version of a flat tire — you can’t move forward until you stop long enough to fix it.

The lies we tell ourselves

We all have them — those little internal scripts that sound logical but are really fear in disguise: “I’m too busy. That’ll never work here. My team isn’t ready for that. I don’t have time to delegate. We tried that once and it didn’t work.”

Sound familiar? Those are comfortable statements, not truth statements. They keep us from stretching, experimenting and letting others grow. And the worst part? The longer we repeat them, the more convincing they become.

In horticulture, it’s easy to justify them. We’re doers. Fixers. We built our careers on working harder, not necessarily smarter. But what got you here won’t get you there. When you cling too tightly to the old ways, or to the idea that you’re the only one who can

do it right, you end up being the bottleneck in your own business.

Comfort statements keep us from stretching, experimenting and letting others grow. The longer we repeat them, the more convincing they become.

How blind spots grow in the greenhouse

Blind spots are the behaviors everyone else sees but you don’t. Maybe you think you’re protecting your team when you’re really just micromanaging. Maybe you believe you’re being efficient when you’re actually

cutting people out of decisions. Or maybe your good intention to maintain standards ends up crushing innovation.

Here’s the hard truth: Your blind spots become your culture’s boundaries. If you, as the leader, stop

growing, your company stops with you.

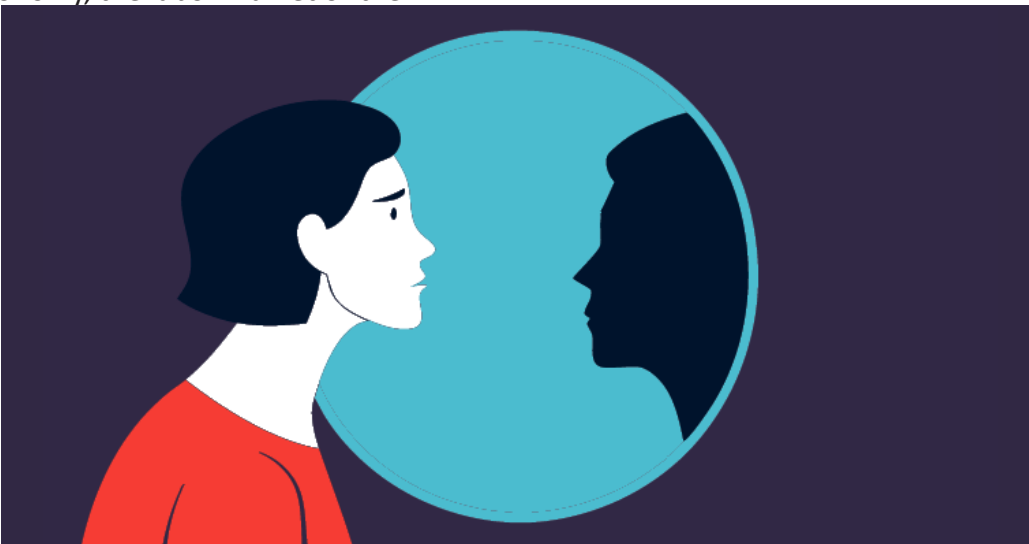
I once heard someone say, “Leaders cast shadows.” That line hit me hard because it’s true. Every habit, every reaction, every fear trickles down to the team. If you can’t see your own shadow, you’re probably standing in someone else’s light.

The brain behind the beliefs

Your brain loves comfort. It’s wired to keep you alive, not necessarily to help you evolve. That’s why the same patterns and excuses feel so familiar. When you try to change them, your brain burns more energy, so it resists. That’s why feedback stings. That’s why delegation feels risky. It’s not weakness. It’s biology.

But there’s good news. Neuroplasticity — the brain’s ability to rewire itself — means you can change. You can literally build new thought pathways by practicing new behaviors. Curiosity instead of defensiveness. Openness instead of control. Reflection

(See *BREAKING*, Page 26)



Transforming Customer Complaints Into Growth

In the verdant realms of landscaping, tree care, and lawn care businesses, the sound of silence from your clientele might seem like a tranquil garden of satisfaction. However, a lack of customer complaints is not the serene landscape it appears to be; it's a silent signal that your business may be stagnating without the feedback needed for growth and bloom. Customer complaints, though thorny by nature, are fertile soil for cultivating a robust, customer-centric business that stands tall and resilient.

Making complaints “growth fertilizer” for your green business

A company devoid of customer complaints may appear to be operating at peak perfection, but this is a mirage. The truth is, customer feedback, particularly complaints, is the rain that nourishes business growth. Without this precipitation, it's hard to assess the health of your services and even harder to evolve and adapt.

Customer complaints open the gate to understanding where your services may have wilted, allowing you to nourish those areas back to health. They can be the seedlings of innovation and the roots of customer loyalty, leading to a thriving business ecosystem.

When a complaint sprouts, it's a chance to cultivate loyalty. Engaging with customers, especially those on the brink of turning away, and tending to their concerns demonstrates that your business is responsive and genuinely values their satisfaction.

While complaints may initially appear to be weeds in your garden, they are, in fact, an invaluable resource. They can reveal patterns in service hiccups, point out areas in need of pruning, and ultimately guide you toward a more flourishing business model.

Take advantage of the “discontent”

Encourage the Echoes of Discontent:

Streamline the process for your customers to voice their concerns. Publicize your customer service channels and clarify the path from complaint to resolution. Assign dedicated caretakers to address specific grievances, ensuring that each issue is tended to with precision and care.

Effective Service Recovery: Understand that a customer's tolerance for a wilting service is far less than their patience for a recovery process that does not bear fruit. Address the initial issue swiftly and satisfactorily to prevent the customer from feeling like they've been left out in the cold.

See ACT, Page 27)

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Tournaments to Support TPT

Fishing Tournament Results *Golf Results*

The fishing tournament has continued to grow in participation and sponsorship! We welcomed 30 boats for the 2025 event and sponsorships were at an all-time high, check out the article on the results page.

The day turned out to be great for fishing and the folks fishing! Weigh-in proved to be a popular place with a record number of fish weighed.

The Golf tournament had an increase in teams entered and the day turned out beautiful. The course at Rio Colorado played great, the competition was strong, and a fun and competitive atmosphere prevailed. We decided to give awards based on Flights this year to maybe level the playing field a bit.



FIRST PLACE TEAM FLIGHT 1

Triangle Turf, John Romine, Keith Meyers, Eric Frankson, Jim Frankson



SECOND PLACE TEAM FLIGHT 2

King Ranch Turfgrass, Tayton Priesmeyer, Cory Braden, Keaton Smith, Taren Parker



THIRD PLACE TEAM FLIGHT 3

Popek Turf, William Popek, Bubba Simons, Pat Simons, Shannon Jones



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Anthony Collins



Closest to the Pin Back
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AI HALLUCINATIONS-

(Continued from Page 4)

employee.”

Humpherys also recommends asking AI to ask follow-up questions to clarify the request before providing a solution.

GUARDRAILS AGAINST HALLUCINATIONS

Because AI wants to please you, when it doesn't know the answer, it will simply make things up. This is known as hallucinations and can be caused by outdated information, non-authoritative sources, not understanding the context or being confused.

Some of the ways to protect your company from blindly trusting every AI-generated response include fact-checking and reasoning.

A prompt such as “Please give me the full context of this fact, directly quoted in context so I can fact-check it: [fact]” is a quick way for you to be able to double-check something you're not certain about. Asking AI to explain its reasoning in detail or verify its reasoning can also help you spot when it may have provided an incorrect response.

When using AI, Humpherys says you should review, edit and repeat. After checking for accuracy, make sure the information is on-brand. Add depth with your voice and data. She warns against the “AI accent” in writing and uncanniness in AI-generated images.

USE CASES FOR GENERATIVE AI

Generative AI has numerous uses, including summarization, classification, translation, research, analysis, extraction and organization. It can also help with proposal writing, crafting social media marketing posts, and developing a training and onboarding plan.

Below are some additional example prompts you can

STRATEGIC PLANNING

“Act like a landscape operations director. Analyze the cost-benefit of upgrading to smart irrigation systems across 10 commercial properties. Include estimated water savings, ROI over 3 years, and a summary table for executive review.”

CREW SCHEDULING

“Act like a landscape operations manager. Given 8 job sites with addresses and service durations, create an optimized daily route for 3 crews. Minimize drive time and balance workload. Output as a table with crew assignments and estimated arrival times.”

CUSTOMER FEEDBACK ANALYSIS

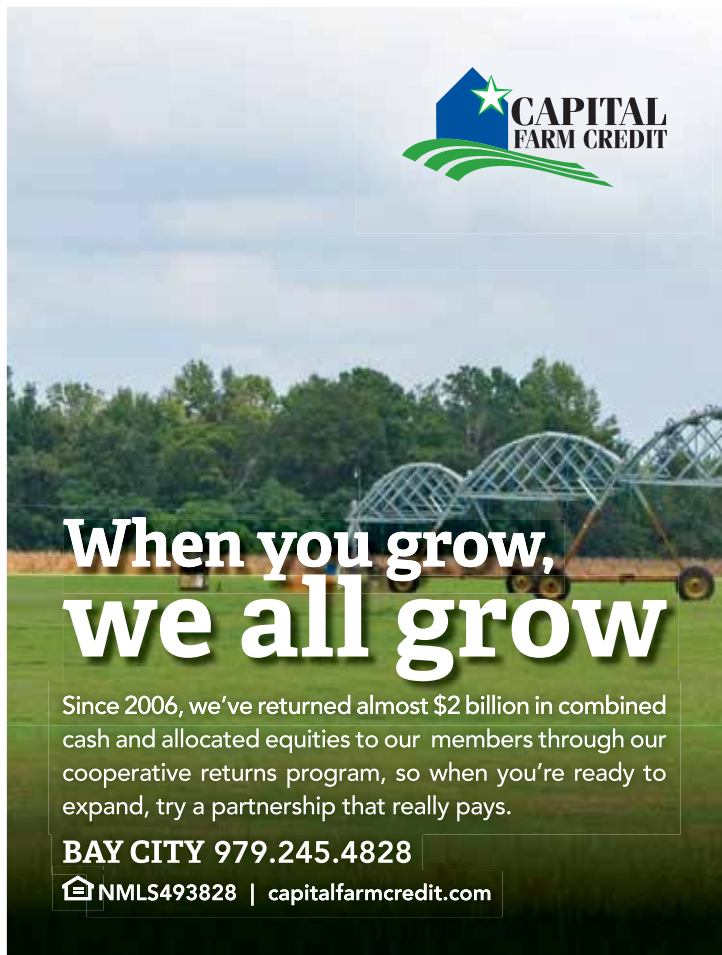
“Classify the following customer comments as positive, negative, or neutral. Group them by issue (e.g., mowing, irrigation, communication). Provide a summary of top concerns and suggested improvements.”

ENSURING ADOPTION

One thing that may be holding your company back from fully integrating AI is not understanding the ROI it can provide. One formula that can help with this is to subtract the amount of time it takes to do something without AI versus with it. Then multiply that total by the number of times the task is done in a month. If you multiply that number by your hourly/billable rate, you will have your monthly benefit.

So, if it takes you 4 hours to do a task without AI, but with AI it takes 15 minutes, that equals 3.75 hours. If you typically do this task twice a month,

(See *TRUST*, Page 22)



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Sod Solutions Announces Strategic Relationship with Australian Turf Solutions

*New partnership expands access to advanced turfgrass solutions
and industry expertise in Australia*



AUSTRALIAN
TURF SOLUTIONS

Sod Solutions is pleased to welcome Australian Turf Solutions (ATS) to its worldwide network of international associates. This strategic relationship will strengthen marketing and educational efforts across Australia, one of the world's most diverse and environmentally challenging turfgrass markets.

Australia's unique range of climates and soil types, combined with growing concerns over water use, demand turfgrass varieties that are both adaptable and resource-efficient. ATS will play a key role in coordinating outreach and supporting the introduction of advanced turfgrass technologies tailored to these conditions.

The first turfgrass to be introduced through Australian Turf Solutions will be Cobalt® Hybrid St. Augustine, marketed in Australia as Cobalt® Hybrid Buffalo grass. Developed by Texas A&M AgriLife breeder Dr. Ambika Chandra



using advanced embryo rescue technology, Cobalt represents the world's first hybrid St. Augustine variety. Dr. Chandra has emphasized that Cobalt will change the way people think about St. Augustine grass and water usage. Selected as an elite line after decades of evaluation against leading St. Augustine grass varieties, Cobalt offers exceptional drought performance and strong overall turfgrass

quality. Its top-rated shade tolerance, winter color and wear tolerance make it an ideal choice for landscapes, commercial turfgrass and home lawns throughout Australia. As a low-input, low-maintenance turfgrass, Cobalt is exceptionally well-suited to Australia's climate and water-use priorities.

Cobalt establishes quickly in sod production, offering efficient farm turnover and high-quality harvest characteristics. Ideal planting windows and production cycles will be provided directly to licensed growers. Initial Cobalt production at ATS will begin in 2026.

"Sod Solutions is excited to work with Australian Turf Solutions as we continue expanding our international footprint," said Tobey Wagner, Sod Solutions president. "Jessica and David Micallef bring deep industry knowledge, high-quality production, strong relationships, leadership and a shared commitment to sustainable turfgrass innovation. Together, we look forward to delivering high-performance grasses that address Australia's environmental priorities."

Owned and operated by Jessica and David Micallef, Australian Turf Solutions builds on more than 30 years of turfgrass production experience

(See SOD SOLUTION, Page 22)



Executive Director's Message

By **BRENT BATCHELOR**

It's Springtime again! Well at least in most of Texas anyway, it has been a busy winter for me and TPT I hope all is well and your inventory holds out this season.

Annual Meeting

I thought our meeting held in conjunction with the TTA Winter meeting went well. We plan to hold the annual meeting at the TTA meeting again **December 15-16, 2026, in Frisco**. The plan is to build out a CEU and educational session suited to growers. I also plan to have some other activities to get growers together and give our sponsors some time to visit.

2024 Fishing & Golf Events

The ever-popular **TPT Fishing Tournament** will be held **October 12th** with dinner on the 11th. The location will be the same as usual, the Matagorda Fireman's Hall.

The **TPT Golf Tournament** will be held **November 10th** at the Rio Colorado course in Bay City.



Continued Drought & Water Issues

Texas has always dealt with dry conditions, particularly West of IH 35. But it seemed the dry conditions are lingering in the hill country and South Texas. This is accented by the water issue that is approaching critical levels in the Corpus Christi area. Time will tell how and if Corpus is able to meet the needs of a growing residential and industrial market. I hope you find the drought progression map interesting I know I did.

2026 Goals

I always try to set some goals for myself and the association. Long term I still want to develop a "young" leader program for TPT. This would be patterned after other such programs in the agriculture community. The goal would be to develop folks who can advocate for and support the industry when needed and improve their personal skills to manage and improve their farm business. This is very early in development, and I will keep you posted. I have a few other ideas I will write about in the future.

As always let me know if you need something.
Brent

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From the Capitol: *Elections, Water, and the Policy Conversations Ahead*

By CURTIS SMITH TNLA

The March primary election has now passed, giving Texans an early look at the political landscape heading into the November general election. While several statewide races will be decided in upcoming runoff elections, one major result is already clear: Texas agriculture will soon have new leadership.

Agriculture Commissioner Sid Miller, who has served in the role since 2015, was defeated in the Republican primary by Nate Sheets, a North Texas rancher, veteran, and entrepreneur best known as the founder of the national honey brand Nature Nate's.

Sheets will face a Democratic challenger in the November general election but we know Texas will see new leadership at the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) when the next commissioner takes office in January 2027.

For turfgrass producers across Texas, the Texas Department of Agriculture plays an important role in regulating several areas that directly affect agricultural production and plant industries.



Among other responsibilities, the department administers pesticide licensing and regulation, nursery inspections, plant health programs, and enforcement related to the movement of plant materials within and into Texas. These programs help protect Texas agriculture and landscapes from pests and diseases while ensuring consistent regulatory oversight for producers.

Leadership transitions at major state agencies often bring changes in priorities, staffing, and administrative direction. They can also create opportunities to modernize programs, improve communication with industry, and strengthen the state's ability to respond to emerging plant health threats.

While elections shape the political environment, policy conversations in Texas rarely stop between legislative sessions.

In the coming weeks, the Speaker of the Texas House and the Lieutenant Governor will release interim charges directing legislative committees to study issues ahead of the next legislative session. These interim studies often

(See WATER Page 25)

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MARKETING MATTERS

448 Words / QR Codes

By STACIE ZINN ROBERTS

QR codes are square mosaics that, when scanned with your smartphone's camera, open up a web page. QR codes are used in place of paper menus at restaurants, as digital tickets for concerts, and as boarding passes at the airport. They are also used for marketing. If your farm isn't using QR codes, here are some tips to get started.

QR Codes as a Marketing Tool

A QR (short for Quick Response) code provides customers with a digital shortcut to information about your farm's products and services. Imagine a huge billboard erected on the side of the road near your farm. How useful would it be to have a method to encourage the occupants of passing cars to visit your website as they drive by? A QR code can do that. QR codes affixed to TV ads, posters, business cards, print ads, and flyers can do the same thing.

QR codes need not just link to your website's home page. They can link to other pages on your website. For example, a QR code printed on flyers left behind at a new sod installation can link to maintenance tips on your website.

QR codes can also be used to track the effectiveness of your advertising efforts. More advanced versions, called Dynamic QR codes, can be configured to pinpoint not just how many people visited your website based on QR code scans, but also which magazine ad or flyer they scanned to initiate their website visit. A tool like that sure would come in handy as you plan your 2026 advertising budget, wouldn't it?

How to Get a QR Code

Standard QR codes (without the analytics tracking element) are fairly easy to create. I used ChatGPT to create the QR Code in this article. I was even able to add my logo to the design. A right click on a webpage while using the Google Chrome browser will open a drop-down list. Scroll down to "Create QR Code for this Page" and then download it. The code I created had a dinosaur in the middle (not ideal), but it could work in



a pinch. Both of these options were free.

To create a more advanced Dynamic QR code and generate a trackable website link (called a UTM), third-party software is required. There are some free platforms that do this, but the codes they generate often expire, or the websites feel spammy. Instead, create an account at sites such as Bitly, QRTiger, or QR Code Generator Pro. You can join for a fairly nominal fee and the QR codes you create should last indefinitely. If you need assistance, email me at stacie@whatsyouravocado.com



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—BRENDAN SEAVER
Director of Field Operations - Columbus Clingstones



Every comeback starts from the ground up.

Sod Solutions Goes Australian

(Continued from Page 15)

through Abulk Turf Supplies, a family-owned company based near Windsor, NSW, that supplies Sydney and surrounding regions. ATS is well-positioned to support growers, turf managers and consumers nationwide as Cobalt Buffalo and future turfgrass innovations enter the Australian market.

For questions about Cobalt Buffalo or other turfgrass solutions in Australia, contact Australian Turf Solutions at info@australianturfsolutions.com.au. For more information, visit CobaltStAugustine.com.

Australian Turf Solutions Contact:
Jessica Micallef
Owner, Abulk Turf
info@australianturfsolutions.com.au

Sod Solutions Licensing Contact:
Christian Broucqsault
Chief Operating Officer
christian@sodsolutions.com

Based in Charleston, SC, Sod Solutions has spent over 30 years developing and releasing leading turfgrass varieties, including Palmetto® St. Augustine, Celebration® Bermudagrass and EMPIRE® Zoysia. Today, Sod Solutions partners with farms, researchers and industry professionals across the United States and internationally to advance turfgrass innovation. A trusted source for turfgrass news and insight, Sod Solutions is available for media opportunities or expert commentary. Visit SodSolutions.com or follow @SodSolutions on social media to learn more. For inquiries or visuals, contact Sod Solutions Media



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VALUE OF AI - A TIME SAVING TOOL

(Continued from Page 16)

multiply 2 by 3.75 to get 7.5 hours. Say your hourly rate is \$50, 7.5 hours times \$50 equals \$375, which is your ROI.

Humpherys says you should also measure your key metrics and consider intangible benefits to determine the value AI brings to your organization.

"You just need to use AI enough to get a feel for what you can use it for in your area of expertise," says Ethan Mollick with oneusefulthing.org. "The most important thing to do is to get 10 or so hours of use with an advanced AI system. And to do that you just need to be a good-enough prompter to overcome the barriers that hold many AI users back."

If you want your entire team tapping into AI to tackle their tasks more efficiently, you need to explain why they should use AI, how it positively

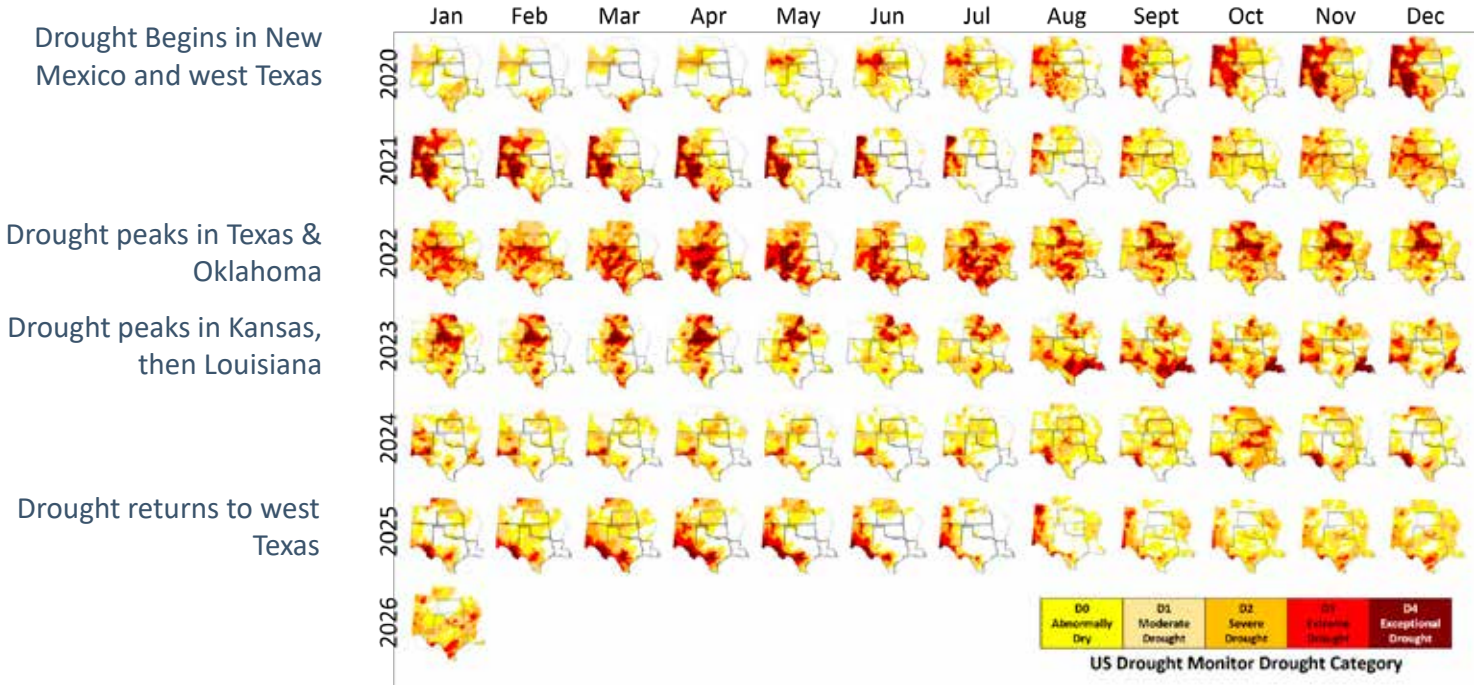
impacts them, how to use AI and remind them on a regular basis until it becomes adopted.

It's also important to pick the right tool for the job. While some platforms like ChatGPT are generalist tools, other AI platforms are better suited for specific tasks. For instance, Perplexity is best for complex math explanations and technical comparisons.

Humpherys encourages moving away from the expectation of a perfect first draft. AI is a content accelerator that allows you to fine-tune the end result from there.

What matters the most is simply starting. Choose one thing to master each day, week or month to gain experience and confidence and see which specific applications offer the most ROI for different roles within your organization.

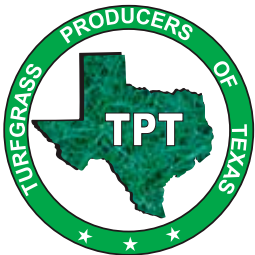
Drought Progression and transition



Seasonal forecasting: The 2020-25 drought mostly coincided with three La Niña events, except for 2023-24 El Niño, meaning other factors were at play.

MEMBERSHIP HAS IT'S PRIVILEGES . . .

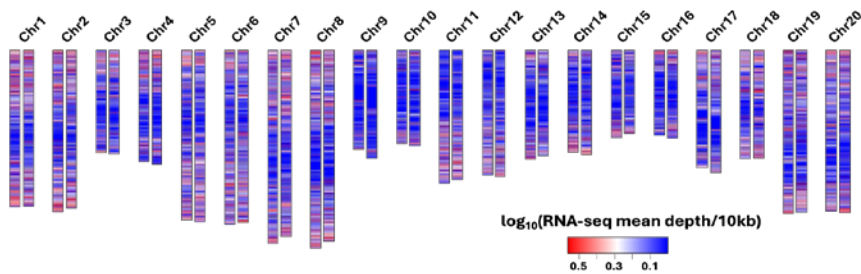
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Turfgrass Producers of Texas
 An Association of Top Texas Turfgrass Farms and Related Businesses

Gene Activity -

(Continued from Page 10)



release improved varieties.

Figure 2. Differences in gene activity between the two chromosome copies in *Z. japonica*

Genome resources can help accelerate this process. With a detailed genome map, researchers can identify DNA markers linked to important traits and track those markers in breeding populations. To demonstrate the practical value of this genome resource, the researchers developed approximately 40 DNA markers targeting structural differences between chromosome copies across all chromosomes. Testing of these markers revealed clear polymorphisms that can distinguish among zoysiagrass cultivars, as illustrated in **Figure 3**. In addition, we have recently developed approximately 40 additional markers from the genome of another zoysiagrass species, *Z. matrella*, cultivar Diamond, further expanding the available marker resources. Together, these markers form the foundation of a new marker platform that can be used for genotyping, cultivar identification, and trait selection in zoysiagrass breeding programs. Using marker-assisted selection and genomic prediction, breeders can screen plants at the seedling stage and focus their efforts on individuals carrying the most promising genetic combinations. Over time, this approach can significantly shorten breeding cycles and accelerate the development of improved zoysiagrass cultivars with desirable characteristics such as greater stress tolerance, improved turfgrass quality, and more consistent performance in production fields and managed landscapes. The new Palisades genome also provides opportunities to better understand the genetic basis of key turfgrass characteristics such as growth rate, density, and stress tolerance. By identifying genes and genomic regions associated with these traits, researchers can begin developing more precise breeding strategies. This

may ultimately lead to cultivars that require fewer inputs while maintaining high turfgrass quality.

The new genome resource also allows scientists to compare zoysiagrass genetics with those of other grass species. Zoysiagrass belongs to the same plant family as major cereal crops such as rice and sorghum, and the Palisades genome shows strong similarities with these species. This means that discoveries made in crop research can often be applied to turfgrass improvement, and vice versa. Comparative studies across grasses can help researchers identify genes involved in stress tolerance, growth regulation, and environmental adaptation.

As climate conditions become more variable and water resources become more limited in many regions, the demand for resilient turfgrass varieties will continue to increase. Developing grasses that maintain high performance while requiring fewer resources is becoming an important goal for the turfgrass industry. Advances in genomic research provide powerful tools that can help breeders meet these challenges. The new genome assembly of Palisades zoysiagrass represents an important step toward that goal. By revealing the

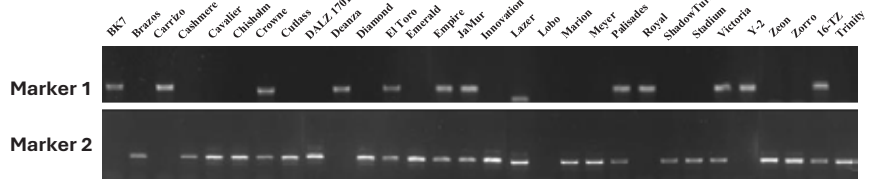


Figure 3. Marker results showing differences in DNA fragments at specific locations among zoysiagrass cultivars

hidden genetic diversity within this widely used cultivar, researchers have created a valuable resource that will support future studies of zoysiagrass biology and breeding. Over time, these insights may help guide the development of new cultivars that combine improved performance with greater environmental sustainability. For the turfgrass industry, this work highlights the growing role of modern genomics in plant improvement. While turf professionals may not see the DNA behind their grasses, the information contained within the genome ultimately shapes how those grasses perform in the field. With the genetic blueprint of zoysiagrass now coming into clearer focus, breeders and researchers are better equipped than ever to develop the next generation of high-performing turfgrass cultivars.

Water Availability Shapes Many Industries

(Continued from Page 17)

become the foundation for legislation two years later.

One topic that will almost certainly remain at the center of the conversation is water.

Water availability has always shaped what is possible across Texas agriculture and land management. Whether growing crops, producing turfgrass, or maintaining landscapes, water remains a critical resource for nearly every part of the green industry.

A recent situation in South Texas highlights just how complex these challenges can become. Corpus Christi is currently facing a significant water supply crisis driven by drought conditions, population growth, and increasing industrial demand along the Texas coast. Reservoir levels have fallen sharply, and local officials are considering emergency conservation measures to ensure the city has enough water in the coming months.

While this challenge is regional, the broader issue is statewide. Texas continues to grow rapidly, placing increasing pressure on the same water resources that support cities, agriculture, and industry.

For the turfgrass industry, the conversation around water often centers on efficiency and responsible management.

Turfgrass producers have long worked with university researchers and plant breeders to develop improved grass varieties that are more drought-tolerant and better suited for Texas climates. Selecting the right grass for the right region can significantly reduce water demand while still providing the functional landscapes Texans rely on every day.

As policymakers begin examining Texas' long-term water needs, it will be important for agricultural and landscape industries to share the work already happening to improve water efficiency and sustainability.

The upcoming legislative interim provides an opportunity for lawmakers to study water infrastructure, conservation strategies, and long-term supply solutions that will support Texas' continued growth.

For the turfgrass industry, these conversations matter. Water policy decisions made in Austin ultimately shape how landscapes are designed, installed, and maintained across the state.

As election season continues and interim policy discussions begin to take shape, the Turfgrass Producers of Texas must remain engaged with policymakers to ensure future decisions reflect both the needs of Texas agriculture and the value of the landscapes that help define our communities.



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Breaking The Loop-

(Continued from Page 12)

instead of reaction.

Breaking the loop

So, how do you start? Here are a few tools that have helped me and should become tools for your business toolkit.

Catch the “always” and “never” language. If you find yourself saying, “We always do it this way,” or “That never works,” it’s a sign you’ve stopped being curious. Curiosity is the first step toward growth.

Ask for uncomfortable feedback. Try this one: “What’s something I do that makes your job harder?” Then — and this is key — shut up and listen. You’ll learn more in those 60 seconds than in a year of leadership podcasts.



Reframe the fear. Instead of saying, “If I delegate this, it’ll get screwed up,” try, “If I delegate this, we both learn something.” Fear can either protect you or progress you — your choice.

Schedule reflection time like it’s a meeting, because it is. It’s a meeting with your future self, the one who leads better, smarter and with more awareness.

Leadership as a mirror

Leadership isn’t about having all the answers. It’s about being self-aware enough to see your own patterns, own them and choose better ones next time. It’s not weakness to admit you’re part of the problem. It’s the starting line of real growth.



Become a *TPT* Member



TPT is a professional organization that provides service and values to its members. We are working with Extension and Experiment Station personnel to develop more turfgrass research. As a member of Texas Agricultural Council, our organization strives to stay abreast of legislative sessions and regulations that have an impact on our industry. Take advantage of this information and become a member today by simply calling for a Membership Application.

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Class A	Individuals and firms actively engaged in the business of producing and marketing turfgrass with 101 or more acres.	Annual Dues	\$300.00
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Class D	Out of State individuals and firms actively engaged in the business of producing and marketing sod.	Annual Dues	\$300.00
Class E	Educators and other individuals who because of their research, teaching or extension work have made substantial contribution to the industry.	<i>Honorary—NC</i>	
Class F	Employee(s) or person(s) affiliated with a Class A or B member such as owner, partner, family member engaged in the business and a current member.	Annual Dues	\$ 35.00

Act immediately to lingering complaint problems

(Continued from Page 13)

Transforming complaints into loyal bloom

Act Immediately: Rapid response is crucial. A lingering complaint is like an untreated pest problem; it can quickly spread and damage the reputation of your business.

Listen to the Breeze: Provide space for your customers to air their grievances. Listen intently, like you would to the rustling leaves, to understand the root cause of their dissatisfaction.

Offer an Olive Branch: Apologies are powerful. They can turn a negative experience into a neutral or positive memory. Acknowledge the issue with sincerity and offer a gesture of goodwill to show you value their patronage.

Maintain Composure: Remain calm and collected. Like the sturdy oak, let frustrations pass by you, focusing instead on what's needed to resolve the issue at hand.

Cultivate Solutions: Address the problem directly. Ensure your customer understands the steps you're taking to rectify the issue and how you will prevent future occurrences.

Nurture the Relationship: Follow up after resolving the issue. Like aftercare in gardening, this step ensures that the solution has taken root and the customer is satisfied with the outcome.

Involve your team in the harvest

As a leader in your business, it's essential to model how to handle customer complaints. Show your customer service team that they are the gardeners of client satisfaction. Celebrate their

successes and empower them with the autonomy to resolve issues creatively. Allow them to absorb customer feedback like the sun, using it to fuel their performance and growth.

By embracing customer complaints with the right attitude and actions, you transform potential weeds into blossoms of opportunity. Complaints are the spade and hoe that turn over the soil, allowing for new growth and improvement. As you and your team work together to address these issues, your business will not only retain customers but will thrive, displaying the vibrant colors of excellent service and care.

Editor's Note: This article was written by Fred Haskett of [TrueWinds Consulting](https://www.truewindsconsulting.com).



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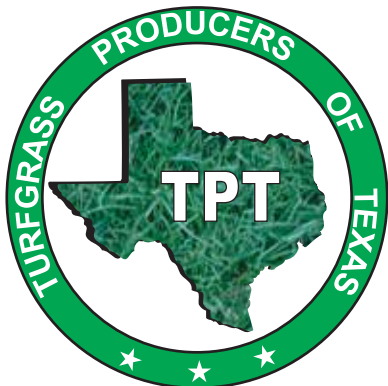
BRENT BATCHELOR, *Executive Director*

P.O. BOX 3010
GLEN ROSE, TEXAS 76043
Phone: 979.533-9750

email: brent@texasgrass.com

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