

Grassland Oregon

Salem, OR-based company focuses on research and development of crops



Grassland Oregon evaluates more than 4,000 unique lines of multiple species annually on its research farm near Salem, OR. (Grassland Oregon photos)



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Key Personnel

- Jerry Hall, co-founder, president, director of research
- Risa DeMasi, co-founder, partner, director of marketing
- Don Baune, co-founder, partner, sales for North America and Canada
- Brent Jones, manager of Iowa research branch
- Duane Klundt, vice president of turfgrass sales for North America
- Colin Scott, field representative
- Phill Lindgren, logistics manager
- Kyla Halter, communications coordinator

Company Profile

- Breeder, producer, and provider of a wide range of seed products and knowledge.
- Research farms located near Salem, OR and Richland, IA.
- Evaluates more than 4,000 unique lines of multiple species annually on its research farm.

When starting Grassland Oregon in 2000, the Salem, OR-based company's founders wanted to take an approach of listening to growers for what varieties of products they needed.

Over the years, the approach has led to the development of various varieties of crops with a focus on clover, grass, and cover crops.

Grassland Oregon continues to revolve around research and development efforts as it strives to provide "Novel Solutions for Growing Concerns."

"We saw a serious need for a company to listen to what is needed and work to develop that rather than force feed what a company thinks needs to be developed," says President Jerry Hall, who also serves as director of research. "Everybody has to benefit from the research."

Hall's partners in the company are Director of Marketing Risa DeMasi and Director of Sales for North America and Canada Don Baune.

Thousands of ideas for new products exist, but Hall says the goal is all about figuring what ideas are worth pursuing.

The company evaluates more than

4,000 unique lines of multiple species annually on its research farm.

Many of those species have never been commercialized, Hall says.

Focusing on Research

Much of Grassland Oregon's research is done on its farm tucked away outside east of Salem.

On the farm, five acres of research plots surround the company's office, which is in a converted farmhouse.

The design of the office, with features including a fireplace, kitchen, couches, and cubicles set up in the living room,



Grassland Oregon Co-Founder Don Baune works in a field chopping silage.



Replicated trials for growing clover are part of what Grassland Oregon grows on its research farm near Salem, OR. (Chris Lusvardi photo)

contributes to the company's laid-back atmosphere.

Grassland Oregon staff, including Vice President of Turfgrass Sales for North America Duane Klundt, spend much of their time outside "working in the yard" doing things like mowing the grass.

Klundt is currently studying various varieties of turfgrass to measure how it grows under certain conditions.

In addition to what is grown in the research plots, Klundt says much of the work starts in the greenhouse located in the backyard behind the office.

Iowa Research Farm

In addition to its base in Oregon, the company added a research farm near Richland, IA six years ago.

The Iowa research farm, which is managed by Brent Jones, provided Grassland Oregon with an opportunity to test crops in an environment the Willamette Valley doesn't provide and



The backyard of the Grassland Oregon office includes a greenhouse and test plots to grow grass. (Chris Lusvardi photo)



Grassland Oregon Director of Marketing Risa DeMasi holds FIXatioN Balansa Clover, which is capable of withstanding sub-freezing temperatures at minus 15 degrees Fahrenheit.

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Jerry Hall
Grassland Oregon
President/Director of Research
Salem, OR

is closer to where more farmers are deciding to grow its various varieties of products, particularly cover crops.

“It gives us a proving ground with the bitter cold and snow,” Hall says. “And in the summer when it can be sweltering hot, it is a great proving ground.”

The goal is to put plants through the paces, which Hall says really can't be done in Oregon to the level it can in the Midwest. With the extreme Midwest weather, Hall says they can see how much plants can handle to survive.

“We could throw the plants in a freezer,” DeMasi says. “With this approach, we can come up with products that are groundbreakers and unique performers.”

Product Development

Grassland Oregon has research partners around the world, which Hall says contributes to their perspective about

developing products.

He adds the company's varieties are tested in diverse climates, with partners in Australia, Canada, Ecuador, France, Germany, Italy, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, and South Africa.

“We are not afraid to be pioneers,” Hall says. “We're not afraid to take risks with the introduction of new products.”

One of the products Grassland Oregon has developed includes FIXatioN Balansa Clover.

FIXatioN will not only grow in water-logged soils, it is a bio-massive and hardy cover crop that fixes up to 300 pounds of nitrogen per acre, according to a trial at the University of Illinois - Ewing Demonstration Center. The company says FIXatioN's roots break up compacted soils, fix nitrogen, and prepare the soil for the next year's crop.

Interest in FIXatioN is increasing more every year, particularly overseas, Hall says. ▶



Grassland Oregon, which started in 2000, strives to provide “Novel Solutions for Growing Concerns.”

Cost Management

Last year, Grassland Oregon secured a U.S. patent for a cold tolerant breed of FIXatioN Balansa Clover.

Receiving a patent can be a costly process, so identifying varieties with the most potential is important, Hall says.

“We can’t afford a lot of failures,” he says. “We have to manage our pennies.”

Grassland Oregon also holds a patent for FROSTY Berseem Clover, which DeMasi says was approved at the same time as FIXatioN.

Managing inventory by controlling logistics has been an important part of keeping costs down, Logistics Manager Phill Lindgren says.

Lindgren was hired four years ago with the goal to help the company more efficiently manage its inventory.

Being focused on logistics, Lindgren says he has been able to leverage better prices as the company ships products to destinations both nationally and internationally.

Cold Tolerance

Grassland Oregon received the U.S. patent for FIXatioN Balansa Clover, which is a deep rooting, high nitrogen output variety capable of withstanding sub-freezing temperatures at minus 15 degrees Fahrenheit with zero snow cover.

“Most regions in the country experiences sub-freezing temperatures,” Hall says.

“Existing annual clover varieties were limited in the range in which they could be utilized on a consistent basis. By improving the cold tolerance, we have extended the range to include most of the United States.”

Hall adds in areas where cold tolerance is not an issue, growers still experience greater biomass yields than the traditionally utilized Crimson Clover.

According to Hall, a decade of research went into developing the cold tolerant Balansa Clover which can produce more than 300 pounds of nitrogen and five tons of dry matter in a single

growing season due to its late maturity.

Interest in Cover Crops

Hall says the company is among those involved in agriculture recognizing the benefits of cover crops, especially as the market for them has increased more than Grassland Oregon’s founders might have thought when they first started the business.

“The way the market for cover crops is growing is mind boggling,” Hall says.

He adds, however, many of the ideas about cover crops are not new, but a renewed interest is being taken in them.

“The road has been paved,” Hall says. “We need to decide to go down the path and not be afraid of what we find.”

Grassland Oregon has found interest in growing cover crops isn’t just coming from traditional farmers, either. DeMasi says cover crops are being grown at places such as vineyards, including the Archery Summit Winery in Dayton, OR.

Those types of growers are realizing the soil health benefits of cover crops, she says.

Educational Outreach Efforts

As they strive to connect with growers to find the products that are needed,

Grassland Oregon has realized education is an important aspect of their business.

“We need to educate our customer’s customers and build a connection,” Hall says. “Not all seed is the same. There are varietal differences.”

DeMasi says this is an exciting time “because there is so much to learn.”

“We impact the entire world with what we do,” DeMasi says. “We want to leave it a better place. Everything starts with the seed.”

Making Connections

Grassland Oregon has found part of its connection with growers and consumers on social media.

Over the past several years, the company has increased its presence on social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter.

Communications Coordinator Kyla



Plots for growing turnips are set up in March at the Grassland Oregon research farm. (Chris Lusvardi photo)

Halter is using social media to convey the company’s laid-back approach., which provides it with opportunities to change when necessary, Hall says.

“We’re set up more like a tech company than a traditional seed company,” Hall says. “Our whole culture helps give us the ability to change in a heartbeat and maintain flexibility.”

They try to have fun along the way, with activities such as company tailgates at Oregon State University football games in Corvallis, which is just over 40 miles to the south.

Auggie, an Entlebucher (a.k.a. Swiss Cattle Dog), also contributes to Grassland Oregon’s culture. For the company’s social media followers, Auggie is a familiar face.

Auggie, who resides with his owners, Jerry and Patty Hall, has his own profile on the company’s website, which notes his primary duties around the office include napping, looking cute, and boosting office morale.

Seeing Auggie on social media, Halter says, helps to open up a wider type of interaction with the company’s audience, which will then typically pay closer attention to the message that is being shared.

Chris Lusvardi, editor



Grassland Oregon office dog Auggie is a familiar face around the office, in the field, and on social media.



Grassland Oregon President Jerry Hall says the company listens to growers when identifying products for development.