

TPI-ITOGRASS BRAZIL DIARY

Compiled by Suz Trusty

Adam Russell, vice president of MVP Genetics and board member of Turfgrass Producers International (TPI), served as TPI's Ambassador during an “amazing” 10-day trip to Brazil for TPI member Itogress' Grand Inauguração (Opening) of their research center (Ito's Centro de Pesquisa e Desenvolvimento). Others invited to this prestigious event included Dr. Kevin Kenworthy, turfgrass researcher with the University of Florida, and Roberto Gurgel and Christian Broucqsaault of Sod Solutions. The group was hosted by the owners of Itogress, the Leal family (José Milton, Roberto, Ricardo, and Tomaz Leal) and Gian Sordi, and Ito's great team of Rodrigo Santos, Carlos Augusto Bedani, Jose Suazo Mejia, Fernanda Brandao, and Sherima Frederico.

As well as the grand opening and a tour of Itogress headquarters, Adam was invited to shadow Don Roberts of the International Turfgrass Genetic Assurance Program (ITGAP) on his travels to multiple Itogress farms for certification inspections on Celebration, Latitude 36, Tifway 419, and TifEagle fields in diverse landscapes across Brazil.

Adam extended a huge thank you to his hosts, “this wonderful group of incredibly smart professionals who are pushing turfgrass higher.” He also thanked TPI for the opportunity, stating, “I hope we can foster future goodwill and education with turfgrass masters like Itogress. Viva o Brasil e a grama Itogress!”

To share the experience with TPI, Adam wrote a journal entry every day of the trip and took “lots of pictures and videos.” This article shares excerpts from that journal.



A field at the Itogress Járđinopolis farm.



This map in Itogress Headquarters shows the locations of the company's 38 farms.

Brazil—The Adventure Begins

We started by touring Itogress headquarters in Riberão Preto, four hours from São Paulo. We met their large team and got a presentation on their total operations. The newly renovated building was impressive. I believe Itogress would be the biggest sod producer in the world by number of farms—38 farms in 15 different Brazilian states. The efficiency of Itogress systems was evident in every part of their operation, which was first class down to the smallest detail.

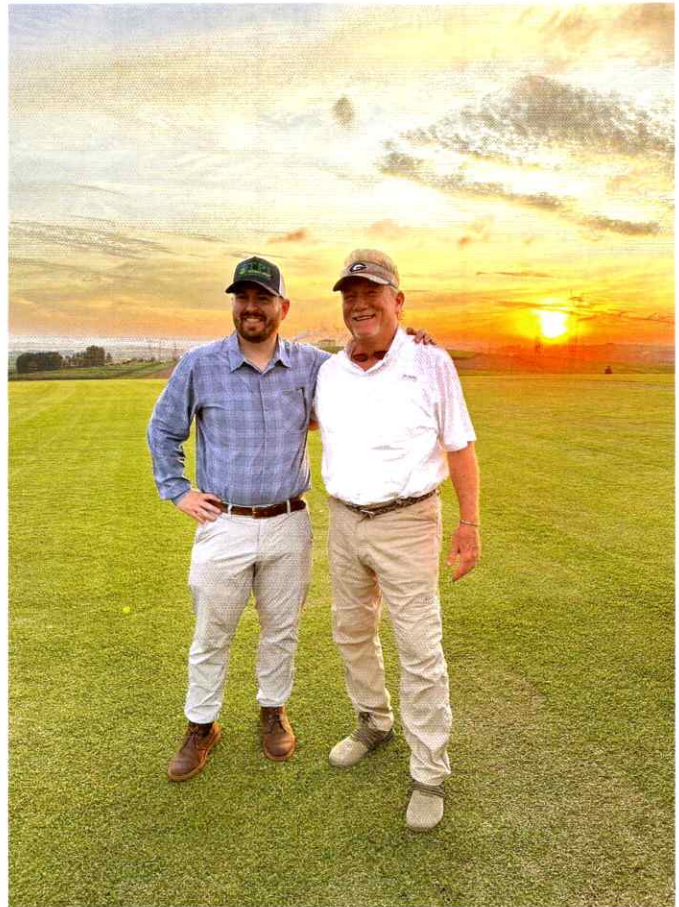


Itogress Headquarters Facility in Riberão Preto, Brazil.



Annual inspection of ITGAP-certified fields is required.

In the afternoon, our group visited the Itograss Jardimopolis farm where they grow a local zoysia cultivar (Esmeralda), San Paulo Carpetgrass, Celebration bermudagrass, and sugarcane. The soil is clay, but not heavy, with a great reddish color and a deep profile. The sod fields are sloped, with minimal surface terracing and long pivot irrigation. They maintained warm-season turfgrass at 12.5mm (0.49 inches). No bermudagrass invasion, which was mind-boggling with the temperatures and tropical climate. Truly some of the best fields I'd ever toured. Credit that to the Itograss agronomic program and Don Roberts with ITGAP for the quality inspections over the years.



Adam Russell (left) and Don Roberts (right) on a field at the Itograss Jardimopolis farm.

Late afternoon brought a preview tour of the Centro facility. The five owners of Itograss were there and presented a plaque to Rodrigo Santos, their sports turf director, for his 20 years of faithful service.



The five Itograss owners present a plaque to Rodrigo Santos (left).

The Itograss Grand Inauguração

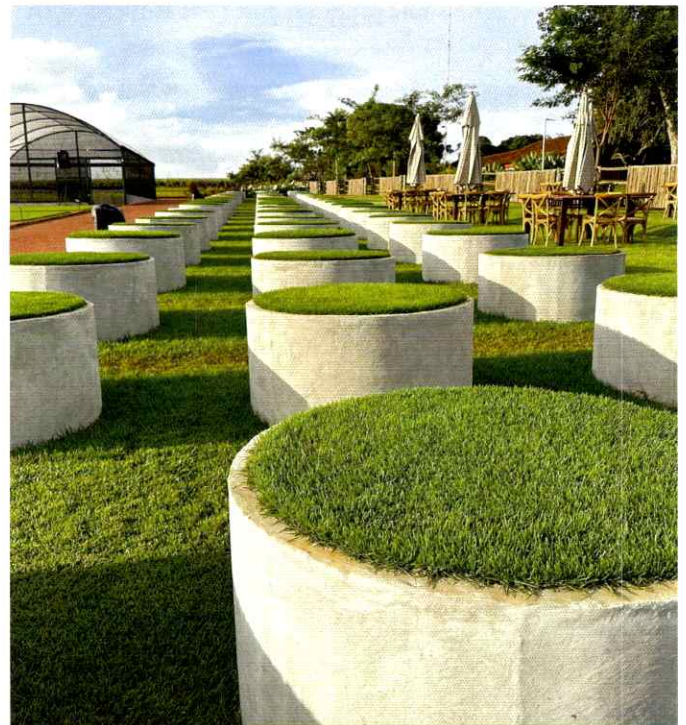


Adam Russell joins the five Itograss owners behind the company sign during the Centro Grand Inauguração.

Ito's new Centro is near Patrocínio Paulista, about an hour's drive from their headquarters. At least 200 were gathered for the Grand Inauguração, with attendees coming from many Brazilian states. The visitors included influencers, sports turf industry representatives, turfgrass professors, Itograss customers, the U.S. contingent, and other special guests. The entire company of Itograss was there as well. After remarks from the Itograss owners, we dispersed in groups to tour the facility.



Research plots at the Itograss Centro de Pesquisa e Desenvolvimento Centro.



This photo, provided by Sod Solutions, shows a wide swath of the Itograss Research Center.



Attendees gather to check out the Par-3 golf hole.

It would be a top-five research facility in America and rival many universities for the number of trials and EXPs tested. In addition to the greenhouse and research plots, there's a regulation-sized par-3 golf hole with bunkers.

A local Brazilian golf pro was there giving putting lessons. The grama plots were well laid out with QR codes and placard information. More field days should be like this one with laymen, experts, and customers talking together. We discussed how to work better together as two countries with associations like TPI and Grama Legal. Every single detail to inform, educate, and entertain customers had been thought out by Itograss. It was seriously impressive.



Dr. Kevin Kenworthy (standing left) and Adam Russell (standing, second from right) join the five Itograss owners for a photo during the Centro Grand Inauguração.



This photo gives a wider view of the Itograss Center for Research and Development.

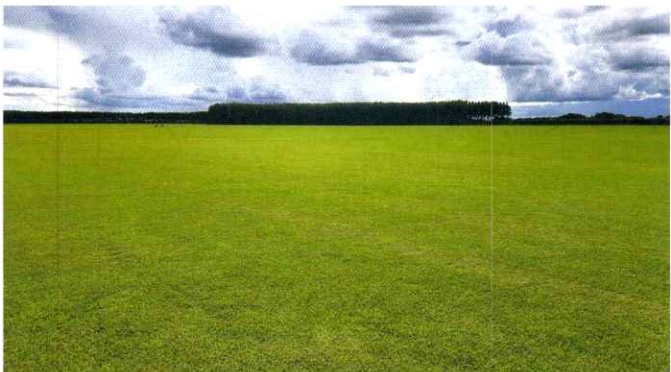
Touring Fields in Brazil

From this point, I accompanied Don Roberts on his meticulous ITGAP inspections of Itogross farms across Brazil. We flew by Itogross plane from Ribeirão Preto to Aracaju, on the northeastern Brazilian coast, a 2.5-hour flight rather than an 11-hour road trip. Don did his annual site inspection of the Celebration fields, and we observed the Itogross Ready-To-Play sports grass product and the soil below. We also viewed a field of a stoloniferous native Bahia that was collected and released by Brazil's Department of Agriculture, a fascinating grass for erosion control.



Don Roberts inspects an Itogross field in Aracaju.

Subsequent days brought tours and inspections of Itogross fields in João Pessoa, a coastal beach city in Northeast Brazil, and Cabo Frio, about three hours east of Rio de Janeiro. In Cabo, Don inspected the fields of Celebration and Latitude 36 on the 230-hectare (568-acre) Itogross Saquarema. Rodrigo had four Celebration Itogross Ready-to-Play fields here, reserved for Maracanã National Stadium. The next trip was to Tremembé, an outlying suburb of São Paulo, to see a TifEagle ultra-dwarf Bermuda foundation block that needed an ITGAP inspection to proceed. Don also inspected their Celebration, Latitude 36, and Tifway 419 fields.



A field of the native Bahia.



A close-up view of the stoloniferous native Bahia.

Ito arranged for Don and me to visit Neó Química Arena, home of the soccer club Corinthians and the site of the first NFL game in Brazil to be held this September. We met Mauricio Ely with World Sports (WS), the contracted field management company. This 100 percent ryegrass field is seeded constantly, and they utilize under-soil tech: vacuum pumps for excess water, air, and cooled water to help them manage during the brutal Brazil summer. Then we headed to the airport for the flight home. Viva Brasil!



The 100 percent perennial ryegrass field in the Neó Química Arena.

Suz Trusty is co-editor of *Turf News*. The editors of *Turf News* thank Adam Russell for sharing his photos, videos, and Journal entries. All photos courtesy of Adam Russell unless otherwise noted.

