

**COLLECTION, EVALUATION, AND SELECTION OF A CENTRAL REGION LITTLE BLUESTEM
(*SCIZACHYRIUM SCOPARIUM*)**

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ABSTRACT: Little bluestem, (*Schizachyrium scoparium*), is one of the primary warm season grasses throughout the tallgrass prairie region. There have been several varieties and cultivars developed, but there are no varieties that have an origin from Iowa, Illinois or Missouri. The NRCS (Natural Resources Conservation Service), Plant Materials Center at Elsberry has been in the process of collecting, evaluating and selecting an adapted and improved little bluestem for both the northern half and the southern half of the Elsberry Plant Materials Center service area. The collections from the northern half came from the state of Iowa, the northern half of Missouri, and the northern 2/3 of Illinois. Collections from the southern half of the central region came from southern Missouri and the southern 1/3 of Illinois. Evaluation criteria for two selections were based on quick establishment, late maturing seed, plant height, plant vigor, forage quality and forage regrowth. The two new varieties of little bluestem will address certain conservation issues such as wildlife plantings, prairie creations, critical area plantings, pasture and range mixtures for forage, recreational area development and other conservation uses.