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to Attract Choice Employees from
a Shrinking Work Force*



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TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY
DEPT. OF SOIL & CROP SCIENCE
COLLEGE STATION TX 77843

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:
SUB-CONTRACTING JOBS
TURFSEED MARKET REPORT

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(Please specify) _____

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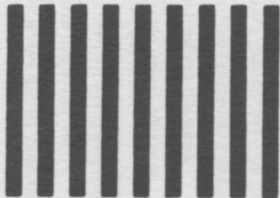
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ALA

SEPTEMBER 1987
VOLUME 8 NUMBER 8

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Personnel Crunch

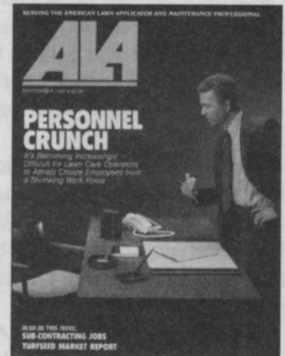
The lawn service industry is competing with other service industries for able-bodied young people, but the supply is dwindling **20**

Turfseed Market Report

Find out how the 1987 harvest is shaping up and what you can expect in terms of seed availability and price **15**

Sub-contracting Jobs

Deciding where to draw the line on services your company should offer can be difficult. Read how some professionals make this decision **34**



COVER

Selecting qualified personnel from a shrinking workforce is a growing concern among lawn care officials. (Cover photo by Barney Taxel).

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TECHNICAL FEATURE

Ammonia Volatilization

A good understanding of the ammonia volatilization process is necessary to realize the affect it can have on your lawn care program **26**

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INSIDE STORY

The September issue of ALA magazine not only brings an exciting combination of business and technical features but a new editor.

As former editor Tim Weidner leaves ALA magazine after more than five years, his talents will be missed. We wish him well as he pursues new opportunities.

Just as Tim begins to tackle new challenges, so will ALA and its staff. But before I talk about future issues of ALA, let me first tell you a little bit about my background. I'm a graduate of Ohio University with a bachelor of science degree in journalism.

For more than two years following graduation, I was a reporter for a Gannett newspaper covering northwest Ohio. As a native of Cleveland, I eagerly accepted the opportunity to return to the city and the challenges of the trade press industry.

For more than seven years, ALA has taken great strides in bringing the latest industry news to its readers in the United States and Canada. Since ALA reaches thousands of businesses in the industry, serving millions



of residential and commercial accounts, keeping abreast of the comings and goings in the profession is quite a challenge.

But it's a challenge we gladly accept. And as always we will strive to make the magazine more appealing to the readers — maintaining departments you have come to associate with ALA and adding new areas of interest

as we see fit. In fact, as a new editor, any information and contributions you can make will be greatly appreciated.

For example, input from our readers in the form of letters, questions or suggestions helps keep the best possible flow between our staff and our readers. Input from you is like getting information straight from the source — who would know better what's going on out there.

Well, I look forward to hearing from you and working with you in the months ahead. In the meantime, sit back and enjoy a variety of business and technical features, including our cover story on the personnel crunch, which details the effects the shrinking work force is having on the lawn service industry.

Then don't forget our regular news, people and calendar of events departments.

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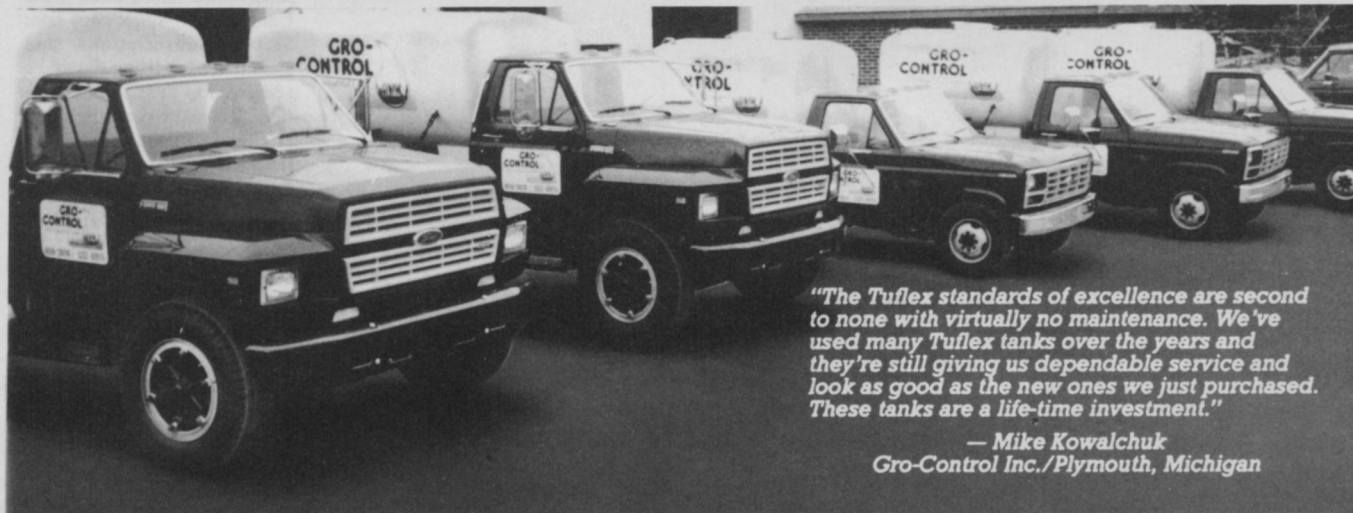
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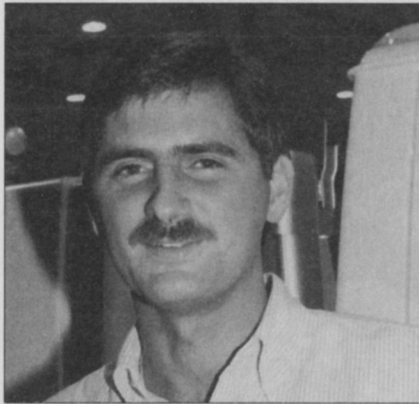
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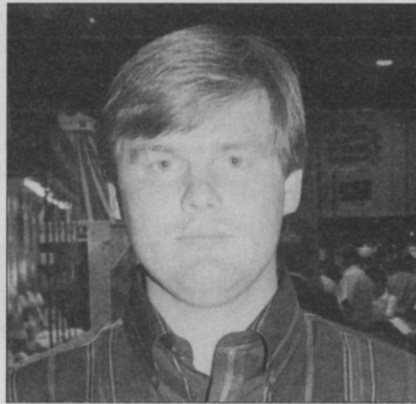
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VIEWS ACROSS THE TURF INDUSTRY

HOW DO YOU RECRUIT NEW EMPLOYEES?



"We look for trained people and people who have experience in lawn care. We try to go by referrals from people that we already employ, and a lot just through want ads in the newspaper. I think you get a more quality individual through referral, somebody who's going to stick around longer. We really don't get into college recruitment. We've tried that in the past, but it didn't really work out. There wasn't enough response and the turnover was so great." — *Tim Neichter, Unique Lawn Care, Inc., Cincinnati, Ohio*



"It's hard to find good employees. Since we are a small operation in a small, conservative community, we are a little more choosy about who we pick as employees. We want to pick clean-cut people. We also look for honesty. And being in a small community we'll often know of friends who may be unemployed that we trust and can hire. We also call the student counselors in our local towns and ask about who is just graduating from high school and looking to get into the job market." — *Dan McConnell, Lawn Care of Southeast Indiana, Hanover, Indiana*



"The bad thing about this trade itself is that the position is not known. So we've been working with the government and schools and lawn care is going to become a course at school. However, it will probably be 1990 before lawn care technicians will be produced from the schools. We now mostly use the newspaper. A well-written ad that is framed and has our logo in it is a good attraction, especially when advertised in the career section rather than under odd jobs." — *Guy Van Den Abeele, NaturePlus, Inc., Montreal, Quebec, Canada*

CALENDAR

Sept. 3

MSU/MTF Turfgrass Field Day, Trade Show, and Auction, Michigan State University, E. Lansing, Michigan. Contact: Dr. Bruce Branham, Department of Crop and Soil Sciences, Michigan State University, E. Lansing, Michigan 48824; 517/353-2033.

Sept. 10

Ohio Turfgrass Research Field Day, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio. Contact: Dr. John Street, Ohio State University, 234 Kottman Hall, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, Ohio 43210; 614/292-2601.

Sept. 22-23

Virginia Tech Turfgrass Research Field Days, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, Virginia. Contact: J.R. Hall, III, Virginia Polytechnic Institute, Virginia Cooperative Extension Service, Blacksburg, Virginia 24061; 703/961-5797

Oct. 6

Ohio Turfgrass Foundation Golf Tournament, Columbus Country Club, Columbus, Ohio. Contact: Dr. John Street, Ohio State University, 234 Kottman Hall, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, Ohio 43210; 614/292-2601.

Oct. 7-8

New England Agricultural Chemical Association Annual Meeting, Hotel Ashworth, Hampton Beach, New Hampshire. Contact: New England Agricultural Chemical Association, P.O. Box 1711, Haverhill, Massachusetts 01830; 617/374-1594

Oct. 11-14

FTGA '87, Florida Turfgrass Association Annual Conference and Show, Hyatt Regency Hotel and Curtis Hixon Convention Center, Tampa, Florida. Contact: Florida Turfgrass Association, 302 S. Graham Avenue, Orlando, Florida 32803-6332; 305/898-6721.

Oct. 24-29

ALCA Interior Plantscape Division Conference, Hyatt Regency Crystal City Hotel, Arlington, Virginia. Contact: Rebecca Crocker, Associated Landscape Contractors Association, 405 North Washington Street, Falls Church, Virginia 22046; 703/241-4004.

Oct. 25-28

1987 International Irrigation Exposition and Technical Conference, Orlando, Florida. Contact:

Irrigation Association, 1911 North Fort Myer Drive, Suite 1009, Arlington, Virginia 22209; 703/524-1200.

Nov. 3-6

New York State Turfgrass Association Annual Convention, Rochester Riverside Convention Center, Rochester, New York. Contact: New York State Turfgrass Association, Inc., P.O. Box 612, Latham, New York 12110; 518/783-1229.

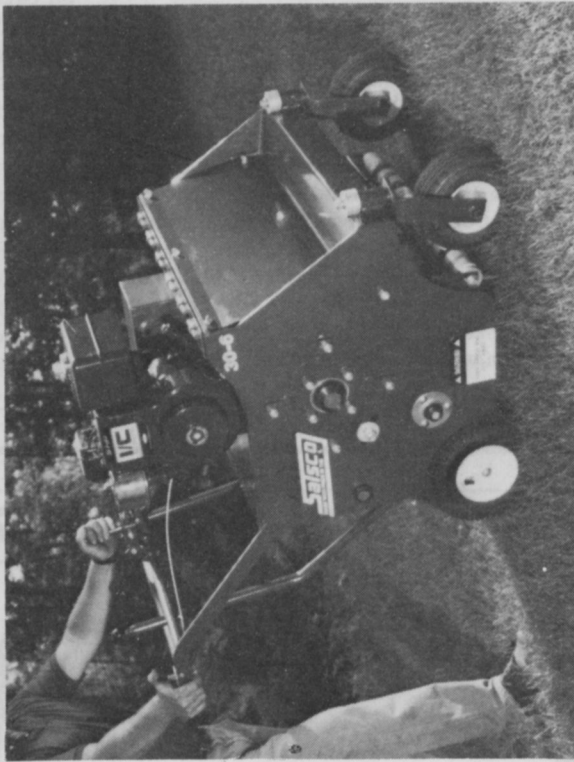
Nov. 7-11

ALCA Landscape Management Division Conference, Hyatt Regency Crystal City Hotel, Arlington, Virginia. Contact: Rebecca Crocker, Associated Landscape Contractors Association, 405 North Washington Street, Falls Church, Virginia 22046; 703/241-4004.

Nov. 9-11

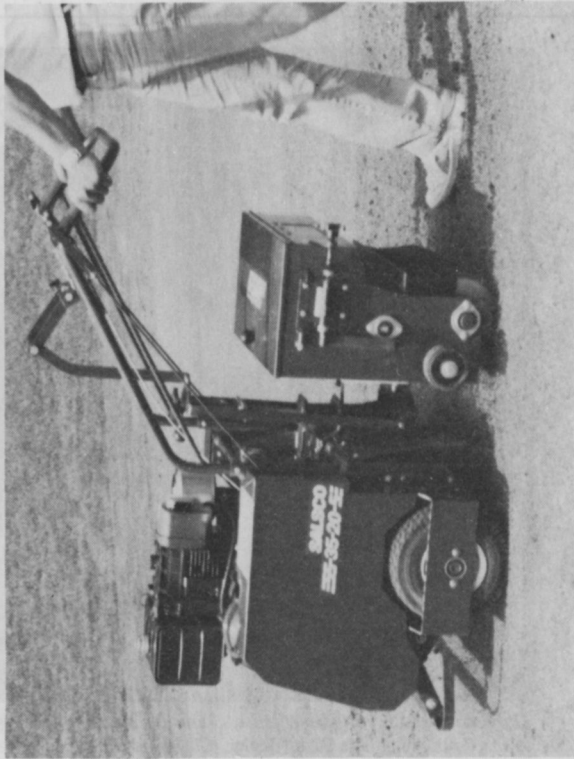
Missouri Lawn & Turf Conference, Chase-Park Plaza Hotel, St. Louis, Missouri. Contact: Greg Martin, UMC Conference & Specialized Services, 344 Hearnes Building, University of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri 65211; 314/882-4087.

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NEWS IN BRIEF

LESCO EXPECTS INCREASE IN COMPANY'S NET PROFITS

LESCO Inc. Chairman and Chief Executive Officer James I. FitzGibbon expects this year's company net profits to match or exceed net profits from one year ago.

In anticipation of good fourth quarter returns, FitzGibbon said, the company will most likely see a 30 percent annual growth rate for fiscal year 1987.

"We've experienced a 30 percent or better growth for the last three months," he said. "Our company has been doing that well for the last six years."

LESCO, headquartered in Rocky River, Ohio, is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year. The company netted \$2.7 million, or 65 cents a share a year ago.

FitzGibbon said he expects the 30 percent growth rate to continue annually for at least the next five years. Fiscal 1986 sales were \$69.3 million, up from \$53.3 million the year before.

FitzGibbon credits the strong fiscal outlook to the success of LESCO's equipment sales. He said sprayers and spreaders are doing particularly well. In addition, grass seed bookings have increased considerably.

LESCO has 36 truck stores that each average about \$800,000 annually in sales of golf course and lawn care products. The company also has 21 service center stores which supply landscapers and lawn maintenance professionals.

"Service centers are growing well. We'll continue to develop and open them in the coming years," FitzGibbon said.

During the second quarter of fiscal year 1987, the company added eight service center stores. LESCO plans to add about nine more stores, each with about 3,000 square feet of space, by the end of 1987.



Margaret Grevatt, environmentalist, claims the spraying of chemicals destroyed her organic garden and lawn. Courtesy of The Plain Dealer, Cleveland, Ohio

CLEVELAND ENVIRONMENTALIST SUES CHEMLAWN

Margaret Grevatt, Community Relations Director of the Cleveland Legal Aid Society and a founding member of the Council on Hazardous Materials and the Northern Ohio Coalition Against Misuse of Pesticides, is suing ChemLawn Services Corporation for \$500 plus costs and interest for destroying an organic garden and lawn she had been developing for the past decade.

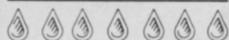
According to the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, the case was triggered when ChemLawn applicator Chris Elliott began treating a weedy yard at the right address, but

on the wrong street. Instead of spraying the yard of a ChemLawn customer, he was on Grevatt's lawn.

According to testimony, dicamba, triclopyr, and chlorflurenol were applied to Grevatt's lawn. The introduction of these chemicals, she says, has broken the cycles of nature in her garden. Moreover, she questions the safety of these compounds.

"There is more and more information emerging that substances previously thought safe actually are not," she said after the hearing. According to Grevatt, many pesticides have not been sufficiently tested for threats of cancer and birth defects, and that no testing is required for effects on the human immune

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According to agronomist Gary Chamberlain, a regional technical manager for ChemLawn in Mansfield, Ohio, two of the applied herbicides are approved for use on food products by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the World Health Organization. If residue did get into the garden, he testified, it would dissipate in a few days with virtually no effect.

However, Grevatt claims that kohlrabi leaves in a garden across the driveway and around the corner from the treated lawn turned brown around the edges a week after the spraying. She also had to mow her lawn two to three times a week during the first month after the mistake application, she says.

A decision in the case is pending.

ENVIRONMENTAL EARTHSCAPES RELOCATES HEADQUARTERS

Environmental Earthscapes, Inc. of Tucson, Arizona has moved to a new, 4,000-square-foot facility at 5225 S. Swan Road. The company, which provides commercial landscape management, construction, and maintenance services, celebrated the grand opening of its new facility in August.



The new facility houses management offices and all mechanical operations, including underground fuel storage and lifts. In addition, Professional Pool Care Inc., which offers swimming pool cleaning services and repairs, will join Environmental Earthscapes and its subsidiary, The Groundskeeper, at the new two-acre site.

Environmental Earthscapes, ranked in 1984 by *Inc.* magazine as one of the 500 fastest-growing private companies in the United States, employs more than 150 people at its Tucson and Mesa, Arizona offices.

JACKLIN'S TALL FESCUE EARNS TOP RATINGS

Arid turf-type tall fescue scored an unprecedented first place rating for the fourth consecutive year by being rated number one in the mean quality ratings in the National Turfgrass Evaluation Program. The independently managed tests covered 31 dif-

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Model 2300 Multi-Purpose Turf Care Machine. For the professional lawn care and rental industry.

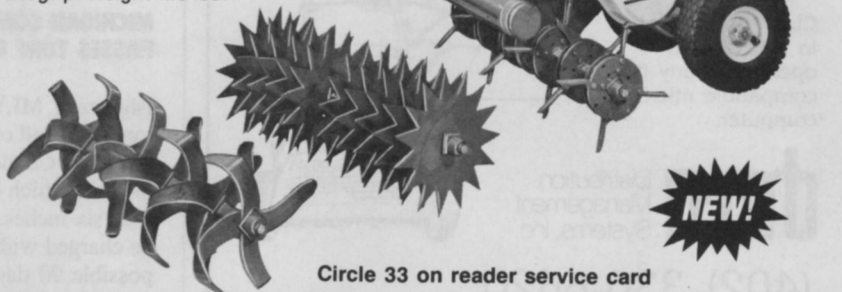
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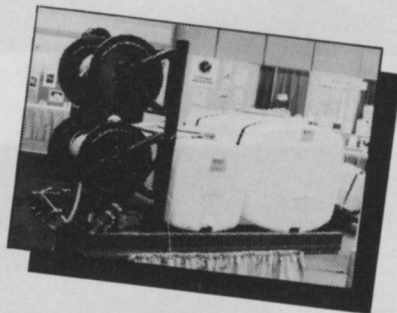
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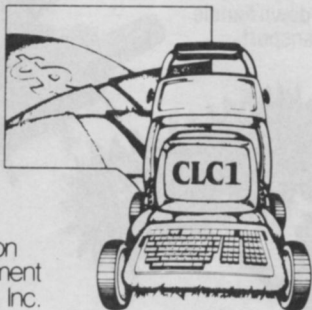
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ferent locations in the United States during a 12-month period.

The National Trials showed that of the commercially-available turf-type tall fescues, Arid was number one in spring green-up; tied for number one in generic color-ratings; was number one in spring and fall density ratings; and tied in the number two position for frost tolerance ratings. Arid also ranked first in brown patch resistance ratings.

The deep-rooted Arid ranks very high in drought and shade tolerance, with improved disease resistance. Because of its finer blades and excellent sodforming characteristics, Arid has gained considerable favor with sod growers.

Jacklin Seed Company said that field checks show that there should be a good supply of Arid available after this year's fall harvest.

MICHIGAN COMMUNITY PASSES TURF REGULATION

Ishpeming, MI, the Upper Penninsula town which is home of the National Ski Hall of Fame, is keeping an eye on neighborhood lawns. The City Council, in this town of 7,500, recently passed an ordinance which could land you in jail if your grass grows longer than six inches. Violators of the newly enacted regulation could be charged with a misdemeanor, which means a \$100 fine and a possible 90 days in jail.

However, that charge is unlikely to be made, according to Ishpeming City Clerk Pete Dishow. The new law was written in response to a number of neighborhood complaints over the lawn appearance of

(continued on page 16)



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NEWS

(continued from page 14)

numerous abandoned or foreclosed homes in the area. Passage of the ordinance does not mean that the Ishpeming police force will be patrolling neighborhoods with a ruler, Dishnow explains. It merely provides Ishpeming with a vehicle to force area residents to mow their lawns and gives the City the authority to go in and do the job itself if they do not.

"If someone files a complaint, it's strictly up to the City Manager to determine if a notice should be sent to the owner," Dishnow says. If the lawn is not cut within 10 days, the City has the option to cut the grass, passing the cost onto the property tax of that home, or charge the owner with a misdemeanor.

Without such a law, Dishnow explains, "We wouldn't be authorized to go on the property at all."

LOFTS SPONSORS ANNUAL FIELD DAY

Golf course superintendents, lawn care operators, turfseed distributors, and other members of the turf industry recently met to discuss new developments and common



interests at Lofts' Research Center for the company's Annual Turf Field Day.

Dr. Joseph DiPaola of North Carolina State University opened the program with a lecture on "Turfgrasses for Shade Use." He was followed by Mark Welterlen of the University of Maryland, who spoke on "New Turfgrass Trends." Lofts' Jeanne Ritchey discussed "Small Business Collections," and Dr. Richard Hurley, Lofts' Research Director, presented "Ornamental Grasses and Their Use in the Landscape."

Following a picnic lunch, Dr. Hurley led a tour of Lofts' research plots. Visitors observed the performances of several varieties under various conditions. The tour was followed by a demonstration of the New Jersey State Seed Certification program.

To be notified of next year's Turf Field Day, contact Lofts Seed Inc., Chimney Rock Road, Bound Brook, New Jersey 08805; 201/356-8700.

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PLCAA UPDATE

The American Council on Science and Health (ACSH) recently released *Lawn Care Chemicals: What Consumers Should Know*, an informative report concerning the possible health effects of lawn care compounds. A national non-profit organization, ACSH is committed to providing consumers with scientifically balanced reviews of issues relating to food, chemicals, the environment, and health. According to the Professional Lawn Care Association of America, the Council's publication on lawn care chemicals offers the first balanced report from a highly respected third party source. PLCAA has already distributed copies to its membership.

The essence of the 30-page booklet is that when correctly and legally used, lawn care chemicals pose no known hazard to human health. Featured within are a survey of toxicity data on industry products and a summary of the benefits of well-maintained turfgrass. "Lawn care chemicals, when correctly and legally used, pose no known hazard to human health," reads the booklet. "At this time scientific support is lacking

American
Council
on Science
and Health



for imposing additional regulatory controls such as lawn posting or bans on common lawn pesticides."

PLCAA says that Dr. Elizabeth Whelan, Executive Director of ACSH, grew interested in the lawn care chemical controversy as she developed a presentation for the Association's Conference and Show in Baltimore last November. Since that time, the Council decided to pursue the issue further. The result is a booklet written by Dr. Leonard Flynn, a regulatory and scientific consultant. The publication has been well-received and is already headed for a second printing. A future ACSH report will evaluate the potential role of lawn care chemicals in ground water contamination. PLCAA has decided to

support the Council by becoming a Patron Member. The annual Patron Membership is \$15,000.

The report should serve lawn care operators as a valuable tool to provide employees, concerned customers, and local government officials. PLCAA members may obtain the booklet at 75¢ per copy plus \$3.00 shipping and handling per 25 copies: Professional Lawn Care Association of America, 1225 Johnson Ferry Road, Suite B-220, Marietta, Georgia 30068; 1-800-458-3466.

Look for the PLCAA Show Guide at the 8th annual PLCAA conference and show, Nov. 12-15 in San Antonio, Texas. The Show Guide will include an alphabetical listing of all exhibitors and their booth location; a listing of companies that will be giving outdoor demonstrations on the last morning of the show; all new products to be introduced at the show; a map of the trade show floor layout; a map of the city with a listing of sights to see in the area; a listing of restaurants and entertainment spots and much more. ■

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PERSONNEL CRUNCH

Lawn care operators search for effective means of acquiring laborers.

The American work force is getting older and the nation's pool of labor is shrinking. This shift in demographics means trouble for the lawn care industry which relies upon young, able-bodied workers to carry out its services. Although unemployment rates figure higher in certain regions of the country, LCOs must still compete furiously for workers where higher-paying options typically lure them away.

Marsha Moskovitz, Vice President of A-Plus Lawn Care of Chicago, Illinois, says she and her husband, President Rick Moskovitz, have noticed the pool of *good* applicants is dwindling. "There's very few people around at all," she says. "The ones that seem to be doing lawn care work are already so booked they don't have any time for anything else."

Finding applicants is not really a problem, she says. The problem has more to do with work ethics. "They sound really good on the phone, but then you wait and wait and they never show up for the interview. When they start work, it's too much so they stop after a day. They can't take it or they don't want to work hard. Sometimes they don't want to do what you tell them; they have to have their own ideas. I don't understand it. I thought you're supposed to work the right way when you work, but I don't think a lot of people think that way anymore."

Moskovitz describes the recruiting methods she and her husband apply to their eight-year-old business. For the lawn care portion of their business, she says, the most reliable method of acquiring personnel is through the classifieds section of the newspaper. In the past, they've used the Sunday edition of the *Chicago Tribune* and a semi-weekly community paper.

They've also posted "Help Wanted" signs in the storefront of their office. "We have bulletin boards and we put those in our windows around the main level. People just walk by and once in a while they'll walk in. We get a few people that way. We got our secretary and she's very good."

RECENT PROBLEM. He's been in business for four years, but Michael Kelsey, Owner of Kelsey Lawn Maintenance of Parsippany, New Jersey, says he's only noticed a labor shortage over the past two years. "Right now I have five employees working for me," says Kelsey. "I haven't had a problem finding help because this is a family business and my brothers and friends are working here. Trying to find somebody reliable to take their place when they get sick, however, is very difficult."

He's already had a rough time finding personnel for this fall and is experimenting with a new method. "Right now we're trying to go through our local community college which has landscaping courses. We're planning to talk to the professors and see if anybody would be interested in taking a work-study program."

In the past, Kelsey has utilized the work-study programs of local high schools. "But what we found was that they (students) were too young and inexperienced for our work requirements. That didn't really work out that well."

Someone mature and clean-cut, who's interested in working hard, is an ideal candidate for employment, says Kelsey. "A lot of people only think about having a good time. They do the job, but they're not willing to work to improve the company. The people that are experienced or have the knowledge to do what we need would rather go on their own or have a one-man operation."

BEHIND THE TIMES. The work force is out there, but the lawn care industry still has old ways of doing business, says Roy Good, president of Hav-A-Lawn, Frederick, Maryland. "We still expect to get a laborer for anywhere from \$5 to \$6 an hour because we're afraid to turn the price increase over to the customers."

The industry should realize that homeowners are always looking for good lawn care service, he says. "I think that as employers we are just going to have to raise the (pay) level so that we can get good laborers. We still have the farmer attitude that we can get the same guys that bale hay to run thatching, mowing, and maintenance crews. I think you're going to have to influence lawn applicators with incentive programs whether it be commissions on sales and production or a rather standard minimum to live off of. You've got to make it so that they can make money."

Maryland has a two percent unemployment rate, says Good, so all the various service industries have it rough acquiring help. Construction workers are paid \$8-9 dollars an hour in his location. Lawn care professionals should be compensated with \$3,000 to \$4,000 more per year than the average laborer, he says. "These guys on the trucks are handling customers and making applications. They have to be trained and certified. So they've got to get more. They're like plumbers in a sense. A plumber is licensed and we've got licensed applicators now."

The applicator's typical 60 to 80 hour work week is another disadvantage, he says. "You run them six days a week, 10 or 12 hours a day. In our industry you don't give a guy much chance to live his life. You get him to crank nine or 10 months out of the year and give him January and February to live his life. That's a problem because nobody wants to be married to the job. Are you living to work or working to live?"

You can't buy back an employee's time with money, says Good. "I think it's a matter of just keeping an even pace for the long haul. A lot of these guys get out because they're worked to death in two years. They could live a normal life of 40 hours a week for the same amount of money."

"I've had to change and make some adjustments so that



I could keep them," he continues. "They're on a salary plus commission-type basis and we rarely work Saturdays which is very important. It's important that they have a weekend. Occasionally if a customer has to be seen on a Saturday, they'll go see them. But I think one of the big keys is that you've got to give them the time to live their lives."

Good describes the types of employees he hopes to hire. He looks for someone with a can-do attitude, who's outgoing and enjoys meeting people. "Most of my guys are recruiting new people into the business. They find people that have similar outlooks. The technical training isn't always the most important thing. You can teach them that. It's the basic human element of being able to meet with people and wanting to do a good job that's important."

When it comes to recruiting, his employees have a pretty high batting average, says Good. "I've got five guys that spray and maybe 15 in landscaping and maintenance, but they're keenly interested in other teammates who are going to help reduce the load versus cause a burden."

College graduates become quickly bored with the applicator position because they've already mastered the technical data and the job becomes just a "labor task" to them. At Hav-A-Lawn, many of them opt to work in a sales capacity with the company, says Good.

"When they come out of school, if they're a specialist in my place, they're going to sell. If you teach them sales skills, they're now able to use their knowledge of the industry, their schooling, and their ability to sell. They're a much more valuable individual than we're able to pay in lawn care. They've become a knowledge worker and can go out and do sale for the company whether it be in a nursery or hardware store. They can still make \$16,000

to \$20,000 but have a 40-hour work week too. That's where we lose them to."

MONEY ISN'T EVERYTHING. John Lellock, Owner of Jade Landscaping in Slidell, Louisiana says he doesn't find it too difficult competing with other service industries when it comes to acquiring help. "I start my people at \$4 an hour and that's a little higher than the minimum wage. But it has been one hellacious problem to not only retain them but to even hire competent people any more. I do a tremendous amount of lawn maintenance and it is extremely difficult."

For awhile, Lellock had good luck finding employees through the Job Partnership Training Act (JPTA). Through these means, he'd pay workers his \$4 an hour and Uncle Sam reimbursed him \$2. "It worked out really good. I ended up with three supervisors and had them for about five or six years."

However, the oil industry is making a comeback in his region, and Lellock has already lost supervisors to higher paying jobs on the oil fields. "And there's no way that you can compete with \$15 and \$20 an hour," he adds.

After several years of relying on JPTA, Lellock started to depend upon referrals. "I went through word of mouth, because I'm in a depressed area with 12 and 14 percent unemployment. It was fairly easy to get people, but finding qualified, competent people is extremely difficult. Subsequently, you're losing your good people to higher-paying positions. My people have hospitalization, paid holidays, vacations, free uniforms, and it's still extremely difficult."

Lellock agrees with Good that incentives, rather than money can help retain competent people. "Money

is not going to get them. I've tried bonuses and that will not do it per se. What I've found is you're still going to keep your qualified good people. That's not going to motivate them to any degree. I've been in business 11 years and have some supervisors that have been with me eight and nine years."

However, promoting the benefits and vacations doesn't seem to motivate the younger supervisors, says Lellock. The labor shortage is a problem throughout the South, he says. "It's not even our particular field, it's all of them. We went through the heyday of the \$15 to \$20 an hour with the oil boom where it was really hell getting somebody to work. Now you would think that it would be relatively easier but it's not. I just don't know what the answer is."

Ward Peterson, Manager of Human Resources at Davey Tree Expert Co. of Kent, Ohio, says Davey Tree uses a variety of methods to recruit personnel. The company offers full service, though most of its 4,500 employees work in tree care.

"We've done quite a bit of internal recruiting which is a little bit interesting," he says. "Since we are full-service, we take people that are involved in trees and cross-train them to also be able to service the lawns."

Davey Tree also works with the vocational-educational systems. "We provide contact and support for the college instructors so that when the students graduate, we hope they'll come to Davey. We were doing quite a few technical school internships but slowed up on them just lately. I think we're going to be doing more in the future."

In the past, Davey has also made use of the federally-funded training programs. Newspaper advertising and contact with employment services is also standard, Peterson says. They're also putting together some brochures and posters for recruiting.

A major share of Davey's recruiting efforts come directly from the individual

managers. "Each manager will have his own techniques and styles just as any manager with a smaller company. He has organizations that he's involved in professionally or civic organizations where he gets references on people to hire. A large percentage of our people are personal referrals."

Peterson says many employees are discovered through professional organizations and associations. "We've found that the students that are members of a society are pretty much across-the-board the best that we can find."

The American Landscape Contractors Association is a society which Peterson describes as being a good source for acquiring personnel. "They have a collegiate branch that's very active but that's just one off the list. I don't that I could distinguish any society as being better than the others. I think it comes down to the activity of the local chapter and our local manager. If you have a very active local chapter, then almost any manager can get somebody out of it. If you have a very active manager, then he can find some people out of even a so-so chapter."

Davey Tree also keeps an active resume file, Peterson says. "I receive a tremendous number of resumes here at our corporate headquarters in Kent. When we get them, we immediately get in communication. We write a letter (to the applicant) and explain in a little more detail what we do and ask them what they would like to do with us, and where they would like to do it."

Responses are then forwarded directly to a location the applicant has expressed interest in or kept in the resume file. "When somebody out of Washington, D.C. is looking for people we go over our list of who was interested in working in the Washington-Virginia area."

It used to be that the lawn care industry was able to attract a large number of highly qualified people simply based on its growth and advancement opportunities. "That has flattened out and we have trou-

ble offering that," Peterson says.

INCENTIVES. What is appealing about a career in lawn care nowadays? "I think it has to come back to people with an interest in working outdoors, working with plants, and with their hands. You are working with growing, living things and there's a real return out of that."

"You can go in either direction," he adds. "You can go into sales and there's a great deal of public contact. There's still public contact in application of course, but not quite the same level. So it depends on what the individual is interested in."

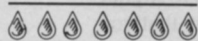
"There is a great deal of opportunity yet, and it's a good service — that's always appealing. I think the freedom appeals to people because there isn't a foreman sitting over their shoulder. They plan their routes and they're responsible for getting their work done. They take care of their equipment and their filling up. There's a lot of responsibility and autonomy and that's appealing. But promoting these benefits and getting people to understand them is tricky."

Peterson says that Davey Tree is proud of its benefits but may need to do more in the way of offering competitive returns. "We feel that we compete with construction, high tech, and the government also. I'd consider them outside of the service industry but we're still competing with them for people."

Regional variations are absolutely extreme, he says. "You'll go from some areas such as the East coast, where we have a very difficult time finding people to other areas of the country, where we can find people pretty well. It's a regional rather than universal problem. It seems like the writing is on the wall, but right now there are just certain areas where the problem is extreme. Finding people has been a very difficult job." — *Julie November*

The author is Assistant Editor of ALA magazine.

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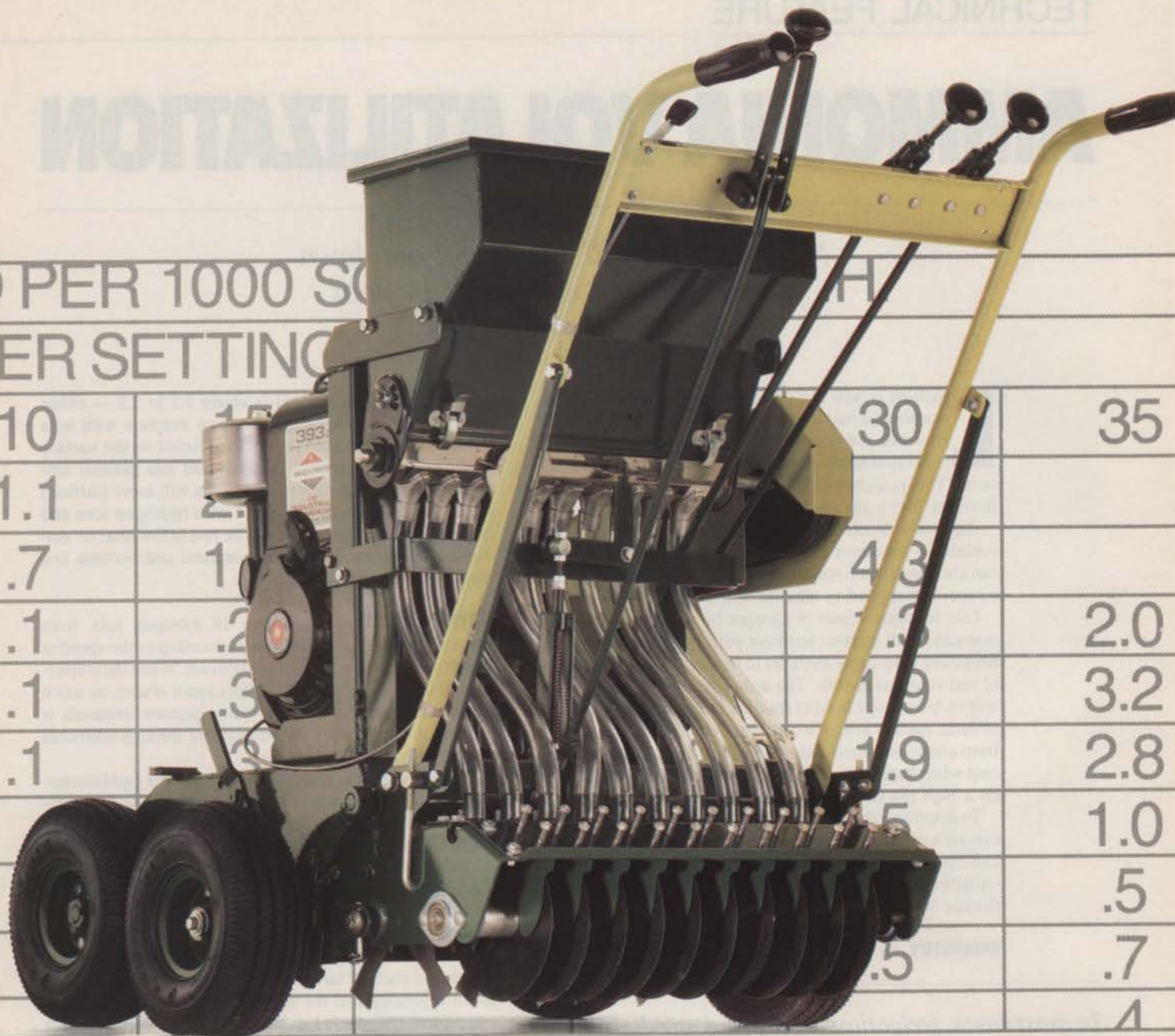
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AMMONIA VOLATILIZATION

Nitrogen loss will vary from one lawn to another, but can result in poor fertilizer performance.

Leaching is well recognized among lawn care professionals as a major avenue for nitrogen fertilizer loss. However, not as much attention has been given to the pathway of nitrogen loss known as "ammonia volatilization." This is a chemical process that transforms nitrogen fertilizer into a gas and releases it into the atmosphere.

Ammonia volatilization can take place when urea and urea-containing fertilizers are placed on lawn surfaces. Losses can also result when non-urea fertilizers, such as ammonium nitrate, are applied to alkaline soils.

Like leaching, losses of nitrogen by ammonia volatilization can result in poor fertilizer performance and make it necessary to re-apply fertilizer to restore a lawn's green color and vigorous growth. The actual degree of nitrogen loss will vary from one lawn to another. For example, in a study at Texas A&M's research center at Temple, nitrogen losses from ammonia volatilization were measured at up to 55 percent when fertilizers were applied to Bermuda grass grown on a high pH calcareous soil (Hargrove et al. 1977).

To determine the extent and effect of ammonia volatilization on a given lawn care program, it is important for lawn care operators to have a good understanding of the ammonia volatilization process and the factors that most strongly influence it.

CHEMISTRY. As previously stated, ammonia volatilization

In most cases, irrigations of around one-half inch or more of water are adequate to move the fertilizer to a sufficient depth in the soil to allow released ammonium to be absorbed by the soil.

can take place when urea and urea-containing fertilizers are present on turfgrass surfaces, in the thatch layer, or very near the soil surface. Non-urea fertilizers are also susceptible to N losses from ammonia volatilization, but only when applied to the surface of alkaline soils.

Both of these situations involve the placement of nitrogen fertilizer in a high pH environment. This occurs naturally in alkaline soils, which have a pH of seven or above. In the case of urea, however, the high pH environment is created shortly after application through a reaction with the soil that is commonly referred to as "urea hydrolysis." This reaction can raise the pH of soil surfaces to seven or above, regardless of original pH levels.

Upon application — or shortly thereafter, N fertilizers like urea are converted to the ammonium form of nitro-

gen. When the surface pH is above 7.3 to 7.5 — either naturally or because of the chemical reaction with urea (hydrolysis) — the ammonium ions found on the surface of the lawn will begin to be converted into gaseous ammonia. Some of the gaseous ammonia will move (diffuse) into the soil, where it will react with hydrogen ions and convert back into ammonium. The rest of the gaseous ammonia will escape into the atmosphere and become lost through ammonia volatilization.

NITROGEN LOSS. The degree of nitrogen loss from ammonia volatilization will vary according to the speed at which urea is converted into ammonium. When the conversion to ammonium is rapid, soils cannot absorb as much of the nitrogen. As a result, more gaseous ammonia is allowed to escape into the atmosphere through ammonia volatilization.

Generally speaking, conditions which favor rapid conversion of urea to ammonium — and more N loss from ammonia volatilization — include large amounts of surface residue (thatch), warm temperatures and the absence of rainfall or irrigation to incorporate applied fertilizer. Ammonia volatilization is also influenced by soil texture and pH, as well as the form of nitrogen fertilizer used.

THATCH. Thatch refers to the layer of living and dead stems, leaves and roots of turf grass which develops between the green vegetation and the soil surface. A thick thatch layer can promote greater N loss from ammonia volatilization for two reasons. First, thatch contains a relatively large amount of urease, an enzyme that accelerates the conversion of urea to ammonium.

Urease is associated with organic matter; therefore, it is more prevalent in soils that have a high organic matter content. More urease is also found in the thatch layer, which tends to be very high in organic matter.

In a study by Torello and Wehner (1983), the amount of urease activity in thatch was found to be 18 to 25 times higher than in underlying soil. At these levels, urease activity can greatly speed the conversion of urea to ammonium and thereby increase the percentage of N lost through ammonia volatilization. For example, in a study by Nelson et al. (1980), turfgrass with a heavy thatch layer lost up to 39 percent of the total nitrogen applied as urea through ammonia volatilization. Turf samples without a heavy thatch layer lost only 5 percent of the applied urea.

Heavy thatch can also act as an insulating barrier that prevents some of the applied fertilizer from reaching the soil surface and diffusing into the soil. This is the second reason for greater ammonia volatilization losses in the presence of thatch.

TEMPERATURE. Warmer temperatures also accelerate the rate at which urea is converted to ammonium. And warmer temperatures increase the proportion of ammoniacal nitrogen that is present in the soil as gaseous ammonia. As a result, warming soils contain a greater concentration of ammonia, which, in turn, promotes increased ammonia volatilization.

MOISTURE. A degree of moisture must be present in the soil and thatch layer for ammonia volatilization to occur. The rate of ammonia loss is usually greatest in the morning, when heavy dews are present and soil moisture in the thin surface layer is at its maximum.

Very dry conditions at the soil surface may slow, or even stop, the conversion of urea to ammonium. When this process is slowed, there is a greater opportunity for the soil to adsorb the ammonium released from urea. In addition, a slowed rate of conversion allows more time for rain or sprinkler irrigation to be applied. This moves the applied fertilizer into the soil, where it is protected from further loss by soil adsorption of the ammonium. (This point is discussed in greater detail in subsequent section.)

SOIL TYPE. Soils vary in their ability to adsorb ammonium from fertilizer. Those with a higher clay content generally have a greater resistance to a rise in pH resulting from urea hydrolysis. Likewise, these soil types have a greater capacity to adsorb ammonium released from urea.

In a study conducted by Ferguson, et al. (1984), highly buffered soils maintained a lower pH level upon application of urea, and ammonia volatilization loss was less than one percent of the urea applied. On poorly buffered soils, however, surface pH exceeded 8.5 upon application of urea, and ammonia volatilization losses were recorded at roughly 10 percent. This is because the higher pH allowed more of the ammonium released by urea hydrolysis to convert into ammonia and escape into the air.

Closely related to the soil buffering capacity is the soil's pH prior to adding nitrogen fertilizer. The lower the pH, the greater the amount of hydrogen in the soil to resist a rise in pH. By contrast, soils with a higher pH have fewer hydrogen ions and will generally have more ammonia volatilization loss. As a result, soils that are initially calcareous (i.e. soils that have free lime and a pH greater than 7.5) are more susceptible to ammonia volatilization losses than soils that are initially acid.

RAINFALL OR IRRIGATION. If N fertilizer is moved into the soil very soon after application through rainfall or irriga-



Nitrogen losses from ammonia volatilization can result in poor turf appearance, as shown on Bermuda grass above.

tion, then the soil will be able to adsorb more ammonium that is released from the fertilizer — and less nitrogen will be lost to the atmosphere. However, irrigation or rainfall must occur very quickly after application — particularly under conditions of warm temperatures, heavy dews and thatch layers — in order to avoid substantial losses from ammonia volatilization.

In a study at the University of California at Davis (D.C. Bowman, et al. 1987), ammonia volatilization losses from urea applied to Kentucky bluegrass were measured as high as 36 percent within 12 hours of application. However, when irrigation followed within two hours of application, nitrogen losses were reduced to a range of 3 to 8 percent.

In most cases, irrigations of around one-half inch or more of water are adequate to move the fertilizer to a sufficient depth in the soil to allow released ammonium to be adsorbed by the soil.

NITROGEN FORM. Not all fertilizers affect surface pH the same way when they are applied to the soil. For example, on high pH calcareous soils, some forms of nitrogen, such as ammonium sulfate, react with the soil and tend to lose more ammonia. Other nitrogen fertilizers, such as ammonium nitrate, generally result in less ammonia loss because they are unreactive with the soil and half of nitrogen is in the nonvolatile nitrate form.

As previously noted, fertilizers that contain urea have the ability to raise soil pH immediately following application. With these forms of nitrogen, ammonia can be lost even from acid soils.

Urea fertilizers can be applied in liquid or dry forms. Some researchers contend that liquid forms are more likely than dry fertilizers to be held up on the thatch layer of the turfgrass since dry fertilizers are more likely to bounce and fall through the thatch layer during application. Since ammonia loss is enhanced from the thatch layer, some researchers contend

that liquids are likely to lose more ammonia by volatilization than dry nitrogen if everything else is equal. This point, however, is still under debate. Researchers at Ohio State University, (Titko, et al. 1987) for example, have found that granular urea fertilizers are more susceptible to ammonia volatilization than liquid urea.

A number of slow release forms of nitrogen also have been studied with regard to their rate of ammonia volatilization. In general, these sources of nitrogen are much less susceptible to ammonia volatilization. For example, in a study by Torello et al. (1983), the percent of ammonia loss was around 10 percent from urea, while loss from

some slow release sulfur-coated ureas were around 1 to 2 percent. At our laboratory at Kansas State University, ammonia volatilization from urea was found to be 12 percent by four days after application, while ammonia volatilization from N-SURE[®], a fertilizer solution from Arcadian Corporation that derives 67 percent of its N from Triazone and only 28 percent from urea, was measured at 3.2 percent loss or about four times less than that of urea. Both materials were applied on the soil surface under temperatures of 72 degrees F. The nitrogen volatilized from N-SURE corresponded to the amount of unreacted urea in the product.

TURF NUTRITION. N losses from ammonia volatilization may result in insufficient nitrogen availability to turf grasses, with visual symptoms developing several weeks after application. Turf grasses become light green in color and in severe cases may reduce the thickness of the turf. Proper management can avoid these loss problems and the associated poor turf appearance.

MINIMIZE LOSSES. A number of factors and management practices can be utilized to minimize N losses from ammonia volatilization. One of the most effective ways is to irrigate the lawn with at least one-half inch of water on the same day that fertilizer is applied. (Irrigation the day of application is essential since ammonia loss can be a rapid process in turf grasses.) Irrigation of one-half inch will move the fertilizers into the soil and out of the turf and thatch so that the soil can adsorb the ammonium released from the fertilizer.

If irrigation is not convenient or possible, fertilizers that have slow release properties can be advantageous and can greatly reduce volatilization. These would be any of the slow-release fertilizers mentioned above, whether they be sulfur-coated ureas, ureaforms, or some of the new products such as N-SURE. The use of these products would be especially beneficial in warm weather

If irrigation is not convenient or possible, fertilizers that have slow release properties can be advantageous.

and particularly where heavy dew and moist conditions are prevalent.

Another management factor that can be utilized is to keep the thatch in the turf at a minimum. In a number of the studies cited above, thatch had the effect of holding the fertilizer above the soil surface, thus preventing its adsorption and greatly enhancing the possibility of ammonia loss from urea sources of nitrogen. Managing turf to prevent the buildup of a heavy thatch layer can greatly reduce these losses.

It will also pay to keep a few additional points in mind. On neutral to acid soils, the non-urea sources of nitrogen would not have ammonia volatilization problems. It should also be noted that in dry environments and especially with silt loam soils or soils with a higher clay content, ammonia loss from urea is typically not as serious a problem as in more humid environments. — Dr. David E. Kissel ■

The author is a researcher with Kansas State University who is well-known in the scientific community for his work with ammonia volatilization.

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TURFSEED MARKET REPORT

As suppliers ready their crops for lawn care professionals, they recount the details of this year's harvest.

Growers throughout the Pacific Northwest have been hard at work preparing their turfseed for the marketing season. Many planted extra acres a year ago. Unfortunately, this year's growing conditions delayed harvest in many production sites. Whether companies judge their supplies as being adequate or on the tight side, all seem to agree the demand will be high for their seed. Be sure to buy what's available now as it may be sold out before a new crop is ready. Don't get stuck empty-handed at the end of the season!

J&L ADIKES, INC. Bob Russell, President of J & L Adikes, Inc. of Jamaica, New York, describes this year's harvest as being in a bad state. "They've had a lot of rain and are having trouble getting the crop in," he says. Growers were originally about two weeks ahead of schedule with bluegrass, but conditions then moved everything back about two weeks.

"We don't have that in the bag yet," says Russell of the bluegrass crop. "In other words, we don't know what we're going to get in just yet. We think we're all right based on our reports from out there, but we won't know until we actually get it in."

Russell says there's no question about a price increase. "That's already a matter of



Combines in a Jaguar tall fescue field.

going to be a heck of a lot better this year than it was last year or the year before," says Product Manager Joe Churchill.

Northrup, however, is being cautiously optimistic about bluegrasses. "They seem to be coming in much better and that's going to be extremely helpful as far as getting seed back into the marketplace. But the

or four years. We'll just have to make due with that as conditions will permit. We're putting in a tremendous amount of bluegrass and ryegrass acres this coming fall that will produce additional supplies."

Growing conditions affected the crop in a positive way, says Churchill. "Things happened more the way they were supposed to compared to last year. We got timely rain-falls and had a reasonably mild winter. The summer temperatures in May and June were more conducive for seedhead development."

He predicts prices won't change much initially. "They're going to stay right about where they are. But just because we have a decent crop coming off doesn't mean that we might not experience shortages later on in the season. The crops are coming in good, our pipeline is dry, and nobody's got extra seed laying around. I suspect that's going to keep prices up a little bit. You might see some prices dropping a little bit into the fall and into the winter months."

Turfseed products debuting this year include Kentucky bluegrasses Aspen and Trenton. Both are releases from the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station and were developed by Dr. C. Reed Funk. "We

In early August, the company's only headache was a slight delay in cleaning schedules, Junk says. He describes growing conditions as strange. There is no such thing as a normal year.

fact because of the demand from the farmers. We've got to pay them more, so therefore we've got to charge more."

J & L Adikes supplies Adelphi Kentucky bluegrass and All Star perennial ryegrass. Russell says no new varieties are on the immediate horizon.

NORTHROP KING COMPANY. Things are starting to shape up for the Northrup King Company of Minneapolis, Minnesota. "It's

pipeline is empty. There's not a whole lot of carry-over seed to help us this coming year. Whatever we get off the crops or fields this fall is what we have to sell for the next 12 months."

Delray and Goalie ryegrasses will be in good shape but Pennfine will be a little tight due to increased demand, he adds. Bentgrass production is also coming in a little lighter than anticipated. "There will be a limited supply of bentgrass just like the last three

basically fine-tuned those two varieties and both will be producing seed this fall. We'll have limited supplies available this year, but we'll be putting in quite a few new acres that will produce again next year."

E.F. BURLINGHAM AND SONS. Most crops look average to a little below average at E.F. Burlingham and Sons of Forest Grove, Oregon. However, this year's harvest is an improvement over last year, says Vice President Sherry Burlingham.

"Since there is not any carry-over, the supplies on proprietaries including the fine leaf perennials, turf-type tall fescues, and bluegrasses are going to be very tight this year again. Those are going to be short again. Everybody that I know is completely sold out of all their proprietaries."

E.F. Burlingham and Sons markets Falcon tall fescue, Pennant perennial ryegrass, Haga bluegrass, and Sydsport bluegrass. New turf-seed varieties are expected to be introduced two years from now.

LOFTS SEED, INC. General Manager Bob Cook describes the harvest at Lofts Seed, Inc. of Bound Brook, New Jersey. Turf-type fescues and perennial ryegrasses are down from 20 to 25 percent, he says. The average crop on proprietary bluegrasses is about 90 percent completed.

Cook says growing conditions consisted of a mild winter, an early crop, and weather that was too dry in May and June. Prices are not going to go up but it will be difficult to deliver quantities that have already been promised in anticipation of an average crop.

Only a limited amount of seed will be available on a new tall fescue called Tribute. "We're working on new bluegrasses and perennial ryegrasses," he adds. "We'll also have a new creeping bentgrass. The first introduction in any quantity will be in 1989."

TURF SEED, INC. Marketing Manager Tom Stanley from Turf Seed, Inc. in Hubbard, Oregon, says seed will be more available this year. However, the yield per acre won't be significantly higher. The increased amount of seed is the result of added acres, Stanley says. He adds that pricing will go up this year, because the demand for products is going to be greater than the Oregon industry can supply.

"The situation for the 1987 harvest in some ways will be similar to the harvest of 1986," says Stanley. "There's just more demand for our products than there are seeds, so we're going to have another year of supplies that are tight."

"It's still too early to tell what the total bluegrass production is going to be because a lot of it is still on the ground," he adds,

"but there are indications that there will be more proprietary bluegrass this year than last year."

Turf Seed, Inc. is introducing Monarch turf-type tall fescue, a semi-dwarf variety that is lower growing, darker blue-green, and denser than most tall fescues on the market today.

O.M. SCOTT & SONS Seed Purchasing Manager Bill Junk says crops are coming in good for O.M. Scott & Sons of Marysville, Ohio. "We expect to have adequate availability on our bluegrass and limited availability of some of our newer bluegrasses — namely Coventry and Abbey, which should be a good variety in the future. Perennial ryegrasses look good also."

In early August, the company's only headache was a slight delay in cleaning schedules, Junk says. He describes growing conditions as strange. "I don't think there's any such thing as a normal year, but overall, I think the yields are going to come out with bluegrass better than last year. Perennial ryegrasses are going to be just about equal to last year. Tall fescues look pretty good with higher yields than last year."

He says it's difficult to figure out pricing because there were so many different price levels the past year. "In general, it's a little bit stronger than last year."

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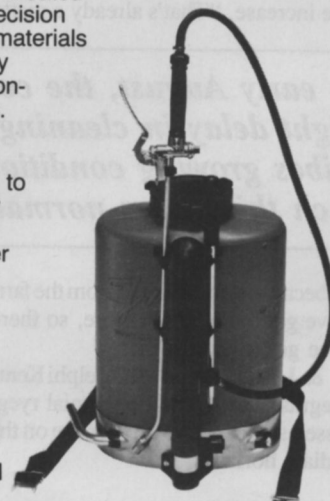
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LESCO INC. Wet weather on the West coast delayed harvest for LESCO Inc. of Rocky River, Ohio, and may seriously impact seed availability, says Art Wick, vice president of research and development.

Wick says tall fescues are an average crop comparable to last year. He describes ryegrasses as average to slightly above average. Much of the bluegrass crop is still laying in the field, he says, but could be anywhere from 15 to 20 percent off to significantly worse if adverse weather continues.

Pricing on the tall fescues, ryegrasses, and fine fescues should be stable, he says. "Don't expect any significant drop from last year on bluegrasses. Last year was a shortage year and I wouldn't be at all surprised to see a shortage problem again this year."

Among the new varieties from LESCO are Trailblazer "Dwarf" turf-type tall fescue, Wrangler turf-type tall fescue, Commander turf-type perennial ryegrass, Regency turf-type perennial ryegrass, and Shademaster creeping red fescue.

PICKSEED WEST. Drought stress reduced the yield on a non-irrigated crop at Pickseed West in Tangent, Oregon, says Dr. Gerry Pepin, Director of Research. "We also had severe stem rust because of the warm, dry spring and that resulted in a crop reduction.

We did have one heavy rainfall in the middle of July which certainly didn't help things either."

Pepin says the tall fescues crop is down 10 or 15 percent from what was expected. "Mustang, our big-selling tall fescue, will be a little short but should still be in adequate supply. Maverick, another tall fescue

is probably going to be adequate again also."

"Of the fine fescues, we have a chewing fescue called Victory. That will be in adequate supply. We're going to sell out of everything but it should be available. We also have a hard fescue called Spartan, which will be the same situation. There won't be any excess, but it will be available."

Customers were informed last year that the company had limited supplies and that whatever seed was available should be bought right away as it would probably be sold out before the new crop was available. This advice was addressed specifically to sod growers....

we have, will be quite short."

The perennial ryegrass yield is down about 10 percent below expectations, he says. Adequate supplies are expected for Fiesta and Fiesta II, though Jacz may be in inadequate supply and Blazer will be short.

"The bluegrasses situation is a little bit better," says Pepin. "Touchdown bluegrass is very popular. It's very widely used and will be much more available than last year. America bluegrass, one of our other varieties, will be much more limited. Banff

This year the company will be debuting a broad-bladed bluegrass called Bronco, says Pepin.

He adds that in terms of pricing, bluegrasses will probably stay about the same as last year, or may decrease somewhat. "I think ryegrass and tall fescue will be up a bit. I anticipate that bentgrass should be about the same."

NORMARK, INC. President Joe Jacob says the Normark seed farm in Tangent, Oregon,

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has additional acres for production this year. Nevertheless, yields are down. "The increased acreage is probably in the neighborhood of 15 percent and our yields are off 20 percent or better."

A warmer than average spring and some very hot weather in late June did some damage to the crops, he explains. "There are some very poor yield reports. Of course there's some fair ones, but even the best ones are a little below what we would normally get."

Jacob says turf-type perennial ryegrasses will be no more available than last year. "They were very tight last year and we ran completely out with no carry-over. I would say that our supplies will not be anymore than last year. And that's a most optimistic statement. It looks like our demand is going to be as good or better than last year."

Prices will be just as high or higher than last year, he says. "Almost everybody is going to try and hold their prices about the same as last year on the proprietary brands. We certainly are, but we're going to run out too. If demand gets to be as good as we think it's going to be, then supplies should be tight."

The same holds true on the turf-type tall fescues, says Jacob. "The yields are down and the demand seems to be growing. There's a good increase in acreage and I think the

crop is not hurt as badly as the perennial. We will have a little bit more of the turf-type tall fescues, but I think that the extra demand will more than pick up the slack. The prices will be no lower than last year."

On a brighter note, Normark has had a much better bluegrass crop than the past two years. "The supplies will be ample," says Jacob. "We would expect that price to certainly not be any higher than last year. Present indications are that it will be a little bit lower than last year. They'll still be high-priced because there's no carry-over."

Jacob says the fine leaf fescues have had harvesting problems in the crop in western Canada, where there's been a considerable amount of rain. However, the crop in Oregon has been good. "For the first time in two years we've had a good crop of fine leaf fescue. But there's a lot of uncertainty because they're also having a lot of wet weather in Europe which will put additional pressure on our supply. I think that the fine leaf fescues are going to be on the short side and prices are going to be higher."

"Even our annual ryegrass is going to be higher priced this year because the acreage is down 20 percent. The yields are off 15 percent. It's going to be in short supply and higher priced this year. I think that we can look for all seeds to be a little bit on the tight side."

INTERNATIONAL SEEDS, INC. Turfseed yield is similar to last year's supply for International Seeds, Inc. of Halsey, Oregon. Vice President of Sales, Rich Underwood, echoes the complaints of other turfseed growers in the West. "We had a hot, dry spring and suffered from some drought. At harvest time, we had an abnormally high amount of rainfall right during our harvest which also caused some damage."

Underwood says the company is currently sold out for the new crop of turf-type perennial ryegrasses. These include Derby, Regal, Gator, Elka, and All Star. International Seeds, Inc. anticipates many shortages due to low yields at harvest time.

Turf-type tall fescues Hounddog and Pacer also had a disappointing yield and are sold out, says Underwood. For fine fescues Highlight and Enjoy, production was fairly good, but due to a reduction in acres these are also sold out.

"We have two red creeping fescues, En-sylva and Cindy. We anticipate a fair supply of En-sylva, but will probably sell out. Cindy, which is new, is in very limited supply."

Pricing will be slightly up over last year for all species, Underwood says.

JONATHAN GREEN, INC. Vice President/Sales Barry Green, Jr. compares the various yields at the locations where Jonathan Green

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of Farmingdale, New Jersey farms seed. "The harvest in Oregon has been average, it hasn't been great," he says. "Bluegrass, ryegrass, and turf-type tall fescue have cleaned out pretty nicely. It's only taking one or two runs through the cleaning house."

The Northwest had a warm spring and the production site did not get a lot of rain in late summer, Green explains. "The harvest is very good. It's not as heavy as we had hoped, but it's good. We already have sod-quality Kentucky bluegrass in stock now that came from the Madras area."

The company's production site near the Washington-Idaho border wasn't as fortunate. "We didn't luck out there anywhere near as nicely. They had very warm weather early on and the harvest was proceeding along very nicely until early July. But about the third week of July, they began to get rain and it held on. It was very unusual, you usually don't get rain out there at that time of the year."

Jonathan Green already has yields on Richmond turf-type tall fescue, but Destiny Kentucky bluegrass and Mesa Kentucky bluegrass, which are grown farther North, will come in later. Green says Gnome Kentucky bluegrass is in early and has very good quality. They are also in good shape with Allaire perennial ryegrass. "The acreage on that came in really well. We've got 750,000

pounds of it."

Green says pricing on perennial ryegrass is down substantially at 25 cents a pound. Bluegrasses are also down but not quite as far as the industry had expected. Mixes were going to sell for about \$2.50 to \$2.75, and were up as high as \$3.75 last year, he says. "People thought bluegrasses were going to come down closer to \$2, but they're not going to."

Turf-type tall fescue prices will stay at the same level as last year. "It hasn't really changed much since last year," says Green. "There's still a big demand for that. The demand has not completely been met yet."

Now in the works is Sherwood perennial ryegrass, which is very resistant to leaf spot. Sherwood is very dark green, low growing, and extremely rust resistant. A good supply of this variety will not be available for another few years. "There are no true dwarf ryegrasses on the market yet and this will be the first one."

GARFIELD WILLIAMSON COMPANY. John Zajac, President of Garfield Williamson of Fairfield, New Jersey says the company has gotten a reasonable amount of seed on all grasses.

Of ryegrass, he says, "We've increased our acreage and our yields seem to be on target. But the demand from the professional

market, particularly the overseeding market, will probably exhaust our supply by mid-spring."

Zajac reports good yields for Jaguar tall fescue which also has had added acreage. But the supply is expected to be sold out well before a new crop is available.

Eclipse bluegrass has come in better than last year, he says, but not as well as expected. "We got a week or so of rain which delayed the harvest until the windrows could dry out sufficiently."

Zajac says a new bluegrass called Liberty is debuting this year. "We have some of that available in limited supply and the demand will certainly exceed our ability to produce it for another year or so."

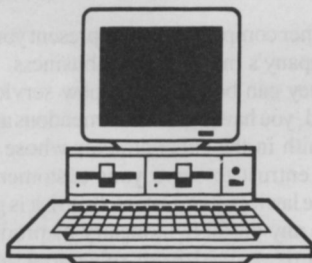
Customers were informed last year that the company had limited supplies and that whatever seed was available should be bought right away as it would probably be sold out before the new crop was available.

"Now we're in a position where for the last couple of weeks or so there isn't seed in the marketplace and they're really looking anxiously to plant. We're trying to get the new crop out to them as soon as we can, but you can't hurry Mother Nature." — *Julie November*

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SUBCONTRACTING JOBS

Knowing the why's and when's will help you determine your operational needs.

Is subcontracting a winning or losing proposition? That's not an easy question to answer. A lot depends on your organization's business philosophies, as well as your particular market area. Some lawn care and maintenance professionals have found subcontracting to be an ideal way to lessen the workload during peak periods, in addition to offering customers one-stop shopping. Others in the green industry who have tried farming out services to different companies don't think playing middleman is worth the hassle.

As with every issue, there are two sides to the coin. Subcontracting has enabled many lawn care and maintenance operators to break into certain markets, most notably those commercial segments that want one company to do it all — from weeding and feeding to mowing and trimming. At the same time, however, poor performance on the part of the subcontractor has cost other turf professionals customers. So before determining whether or not subcontracting is a good idea, you need to consider how it will affect your company's productivity, scheduling, profitability, quality of work, and customer satisfaction.

"A wise contractor stays with his main line of work and concentrates on his specialty. It's easier and more economical for him to subcontract atypical work," said Bruce Church, secretary-treasurer of Church Landscaping Company, Inc., Lombard, Illinois, who recently was interviewed by *The Landscape Contractor* magazine. "Anytime you go outside the realm of your typical operation is the time to seriously consider subcontracting. Ask yourself, 'Can a subcontractor do this job more cost effectively



Some lawn care professionals are turning to subcontractors for specialized jobs.



One of a variety of jobs which can be turned over to a subcontractor.

at the same level of quality without reflecting negatively on the image of your company to your client?"

Oftentimes a subcontractor can do a particular job more cost effectively. It's the quality of job and the kind of image he portrays that worries would-be contractors. Letting

another company's work represent your own company's image is risky business. While money can be made and new services offered, you have to have a tremendous amount of faith in the subcontractor whose hands you entrust to serve your customers. For some lawn care operators, that risk is greater than any possible monetary or production rewards derived from subcontracting.

Bill Rowland, president of the Topeka, Kansas-based company Leprechaun Lawns, believes in having an area of expertise like Bruce Church. His motto is "Keep it simple, stupid." However, unlike Church, he also works by another motto, "If you want the job done right you better do it yourself."

Up until a few years ago, Rowland was farming out big mowing jobs and some tree work. But he stopped doing so after several subcontracted jobs were done poorly. "My experience has been that subcontracting has always cost me more money than it's made. I've just learned to walk away (from certain jobs)," he explains. And that includes big contracts requiring total maintenance.

Generally speaking, Rowland says, a con-

tractor has no control over a subcontractor's employees. "You have no control over what they do or how they do it. And if they goof up, the person that contracted the job from you does not care that it was a subcontractor who did it or not. They want you to take care of it."

And many times that is difficult since the subcontractor was hired to provide a service that you don't handle in the first place. "If a subcontractor goofs up," Rowland said, "that means you not only have a job that you don't normally do, but you now have a job that's done wrong that you normally don't do, and you have to try to correct it."

To do so, one usually has to hire another subcontractor, and he wants an astronomical amount of money to correct somebody else's mistake, he said. "So now you're paying two or three times as much money to get the same work done and your client's not happy and you're not happy."

While it is nice to get to a percentage of someone else's business, Rowland says, a company needs to weigh the profits against the potential losses. All it takes is one sloppy subcontracting job for a customer to start bad-mouthing a lawn care operator's business, even though his company wasn't the actual one providing the service, he

explains.

Rather than putting his company's reputation on the line, Rowland prefers to pass the work on to his colleagues. "If I don't know how to do the job, I stay away from it. We've got a couple full-service companies here and they do a very good job. I just don't feel like I am prepared to compete with them."

Many commercial accounts today — in fact, even many residential customers — want to deal with one company for their entire lawn and landscape maintenance needs. Because of this, there are more full-service lawn care companies in business than ever before. But it's not always easy for the small operator to branch into additional services. The chemical lawn care operator would have to make a substantial investment in equipment to break into the mowing market. Conversely, a mowing maintenance professional would have to get a pesticide license and familiarize himself with the regulatory requirements if he were prone to enter the chemical arena. Without foregoing the opportunity to bid on large commercial accounts, subcontracting offers these companies an avenue into markets they might otherwise be unable to tap into on their own.

Rick White, Vice President of ServiceMaster's lawn care division, head-

quartered in Wheaton, Illinois, believes "it's worthwhile for a lawn care company to have a close working relationship with a mowing maintenance company so that they can offer these services together, either through subcontracting or referral."

Since ServiceMaster's lawn care franchises are company-owned, there is no standard policy regarding subcontracting. However, White says, most franchises will either recommend a mowing maintenance company and bid on a job with two different contracts, or serve as the subcontractor who provides chemical lawn care for the contracting mowing maintenance company. He usually recommends the latter.

"If you're the lawn care company, you're probably going to be on the lawn four or five times a year. The mowing maintenance company is there every week. He will probably generate more questions about service from the customer," White explains.

In the case of the lawn care professional subbing out work to the mowing maintenance operator, he says, "If something doesn't get cut or if grass clippings are blown onto a patio, it may be another company causing the problem, but you're going to get the call from the customer who's asking what will be done about it. And you're not

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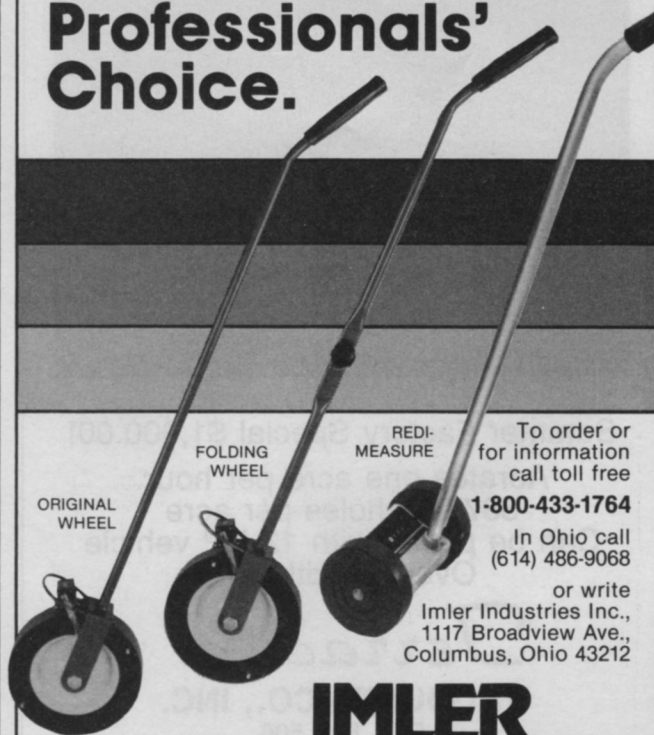
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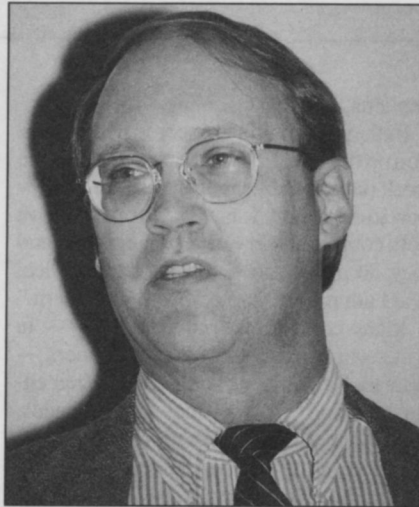
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in a position to say, 'Well, it will be taken care of by the end of the day,' because you really don't have that much control over the other company."

According to White, traditionally the lawn care operator is more apt to serve as the subcontractor himself, rather than the primary contractor. "The mowing maintenance company is usually the one to contract us to do the smaller part of the contract," he says.

While mowing and trimming may be the most common subcontracted services, they are not the only ones. Lawn renovation, tree and shrub care, irrigation and patio or deck construction are other popular areas that lawn care operators often get involved with on a subcontracting basis. And because some of these services are requested on a one-time-only basis or on a schedule less routine than mowing, it is often more convenient for lawn care operators to subcontract these services.

Don Gerber, president of Gerber Multi-Service Corporation, Webster Groves, Missouri, has used subcontracting as a management strategy during times of transition. For example, Gerber is currently amid establishing his company's own irrigation division. Rather than turning away calls for this specialty, he will sub out the work until his company is ready to handle such requests on its own.



Rudd McGary



Rick White

In his market area — greater St. Louis — there is a big demand for full-service companies. Consequently, Gerber's business has diversified quite a bit over the last four years. In addition to chemical lawn care, the company offers tree and shrub care, commercial and residential grounds maintenance, landscape design and installation, lawn renovation, aeration, reseeding, tuckpointing (for laying brick patios), chimney sweeping and indoor janitorial services.

One challenge facing Gerber, as well as many other owners of multi-service companies, is keeping all of his divisions well staffed. Service companies depend on their manpower. However, like most service companies, Gerber's has to contend with employee turnover at times.

While there is nothing worse than losing a key employee during peak season, the situation does not have to be fatal, according to Gerber. To lighten the work load

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during busy periods or when short on staff, Gerber subcontracts work out to other companies. Recently, he farmed out a tree spraying job.

"We've just been too busy. We had a little too much employee turnover in that area, so I decided to sub the work out," he says. "My subcontractor is going to do one whole round of my tree and shrub care program."

Gerber has had positive experiences with subcontracting. "I used to have another lawn care service in Dallas and I had a lot of luck subcontracting out work. I find subcontracting to be a good way to do things. It gets the job done fast. And usually," he says, "there are other companies out there that are hurting for the business more than we are."

While it may seem like Gerber is giving away business, he believes it's best in the long run to have someone else temporarily service his accounts than lose them completely.

He's never had any problems with subcontractors trying to steal his customers, he says. "Everyone I've dealt with has been very ethical. I haven't seen any subcontractor overstep his bounds at all."

Of course, that's because Gerber only works with reputable contractors. "I go entirely by their reputation," he explains. "I don't fool with shopping price at all. I only go for the person that I think will do the best job and represent me the best."

As the primary contractor, you owe it to your customers to give them the best. Check references, advises Rudd McGary, a senior consultant for All-Green Management Associates, Columbus, Ohio. "Ask a potential subcontractor for a minimum of three people they've serviced so you can see what they thought of the company."

Naturally, their references will be biased, because no one is going to recommend calling disgruntled customers, he says. Therefore, in order to get a more objective evaluation of the company's service, he suggests getting additional contacts from the subcontractor's original references. "Ask these people if they know of anyone who's also had the service. That way you'll have a secondary source of reference."

Secondly, he says, find out how competitive the subcontractor's prices are in the marketplace. "I would not choose the cheapest person out there," McGary says. "I might choose the most expensive, but before doing so I would like to know what is included in that pricing. Most of the time," he says, "the competition in the marketplace will keep prices fairly close. But occasionally you'll see somebody who does better work and consequently charges more."

Another way to evaluate a potential subcontractor, McGary says, is to review some of the company's advertising literature and direct-mail pieces. "Usually the quality of this literature will give you an indication of the way the company presents itself."

When choosing a subcontractor, another concern is the crew size and employment history of that crew. "I always like to ask about the crew size and how long they have had their crews," McGary says. "If somebody says, 'I can get 40 guys,' that's nice. So can I — go down to prison and get 40 workers," he laughs. "The big question is, do they know what they're doing? Since you're not going to have direct control over the job, you want to be sure that the subcontractor has crews with trained people. You don't want to have to worry whether or not they're putting in brick courtyards upside down or making arbitrary horticultural deci-

sions."

Generally, if a subcontractor has had his crew for over a year, he's had a chance to make sure that the crew members know how to do the job right, McGary explains.

One word of caution before getting involved with any subcontractor — make sure the company is insured and can provide proof of coverage. "If you're planting a tree," McGary notes, "you're planting a tree. But, if on the second day that tree falls over and crushes the house, then you want to make sure that the subcontractor has insurance to cover it. The key is that the subcontractor or supplier has to provide insurance for work

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that you don't want to be providing."

Some lawn care companies avoid subcontracting because of the liability issue. "We don't get into subcontracting at all," explains Dean Dillard, Assistant Manager of Nu-Lawn in South Vienna, Ohio. "The biggest thing is insurance. If a subcontractor messes up, then we'd be responsible for it. And we're trying to keep our premiums down by trying to avoid any additional claims," he explains. "If a customer wants dethatching, aeration, or rolling, we have a list of companies who we think do really good work and we just pass their names onto the customer. It's up to them to get their own bids from the various companies. That way it keeps us from being in the middle."

While you want to make sure that your subcontractor has adequate insurance coverage, you must keep in mind that as the primary contractor you are liable for all the subcontractors you hire. Some insurance companies may require your company to co-insure your subcontractors regardless of that firm's own liability coverage, according to Gary Mack of American Lawn of Maryland, Inc. in Gaithersburg.

Proof of insurance on the subcontractor's part was not good enough for his insurance carrier. In addition to notifying his insurance company of his engagement in subcontracting activity, Mack must co-insure his sub-

contractors. That's a cost that a lot of lawn care operators don't think about, he says. "If you do use a subcontractor, you can't just trade dollars. You have to mark up your prices because you have other costs involved, such as insurance."

The old formula for marking up subcontracting work, according to Mack, was 10 percent for overhead, 10 percent for profit, and 5 to 10 percent for slop or things that went wrong. Today, it's more like 15 to 20 percent for overhead, he notes.

Mack does very little subcontracting. He has one mowing subcontract, which he describes as "a pain in the butt," but he prefers to avoid third-party situations. He used to act as a subcontractor for mowing maintenance companies, but has even strayed away from that end. "We had a lot of pay problems with mowing subcontracts. We do it once in a while now, if I know the account and I'm sure I'm going to get my money," he says. Oftentimes, he asks for payment upfront. "Check the reputation of any company you have a subcontract with. Will they pay you?"

Generally, in a subcontracting situation, the primary contractor collects payment from the customer and then pays the subcontractor accordingly. One way to keep a good subcontractor is to pay his invoice in a timely manner. If you expect him to per-

form on time, then he has the right to expect prompt payment.

All fees should be spelled out in a contract. In fact, any time you engage in any business activity with another company, a contract should be drawn up. According to McGary, a contract provides some quality assurance. "A contract is necessary so both the contractor and the subcontractor understand what and when the services are to be rendered." In addition, all other terms should be spelled out, including payment, proof of insurance, and any contingency clauses.

"Another thing you might consider in your contract is some sort of non-compete agreement," McGary suggests. "For instance, if we get you a customer and they call you next year for some major project, what do you think is fair for that continuing business?"

While subcontracting can open up new doors for your business and improve your profit margins, you have to recognize the risk involved. To minimize that risk, make sure you screen your subcontractors carefully. "Make sure you're dealing with people that perform the kind of quality of work that you expect it to be," advises Mack. "After all, they are representing your company and your reputation." — Vivian F. Rose ■

The author is Assistant Editor of ALA magazine.

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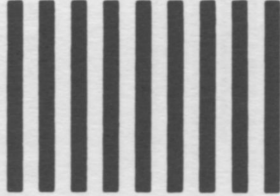
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Steve Gipson has joined LESCO, Inc. as manager for LESCO parts and after-market replacement parts. A 15-year veteran of the TRW Golf Club in Chesterland, Ohio, he served as superintendent and general manager. Active in many turfgrass associations, Gipson was the recipient of the Ohio Turfgrass Association's Professional Excellence Award and a Golf Course Superintendent's Association of America scholarship. He is a graduate of Purdue University.

H. John Smith has been elected president of Exmark Manufacturing Company by the organization's board of directors. Smith, who has worked with Exmark in the past as a manufacturer's representative for the Holiman Company, has held various management positions with The Ariens Company and Wheelhorse Products, Inc.

Smith succeeds **Robert Martin**, who has assumed the newly created position of chairman of the board of directors for Exmark. In this position, Martin will play an active role in charting the company's future growth. ■

The lawn care industry mourns the loss of **Dr. Robert W. Schery**, noted turfgrass seed scientist, lecturer, and consultant. Schery, who was founding Executive Director of the Lawn Institute, died at home in Marysville, Ohio, at the age of 70.

During his career, Schery originated educational and technical materials on seeding, maintaining, and renovating lawns and sports turf, and served as a liaison between the Lawn Institute and technical specialists at land grant colleges and associated agricultural experiment stations across the country.

In addition to penning a number of books, including *Plants for Man*, *The Lawn Book* and *A Perfect Lawn*, he was a contributor to *Encyclopedia Britannica*, *Encyclopedia Americana* and *World Book*. His research projects involving economic botany and popular horticulture also earned him bylines in several hundred magazine and journal articles.



A member of a long and distinguished list of industry associations, Schery served as chairman of the Lawn and Turfgrass Division of the American Seed Trade Association, on its board of directors and on various committees.



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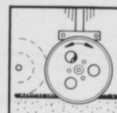
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Ever-green Lawns, a Division of The Hawley Group, Ltd., an international service company doing in excess of a billion dollars in sales annually, wants to acquire lawn care companies of all sizes. All inquiries strictly confidential. Please contact: Steve Hirshmugl, Director of Finance and Acquisitions, Ever-green Lawns Corporation, 1390 Charlestown Industrial Drive, St. Charles, Missouri 63303; 314/946-9700.

HELP WANTED

Career Opportunities

ChemLawn is now accepting applications for the positions of Lawn Specialist in our expanding Florida markets. Join the Nation's Leader in Lawn Care. Send resume to ALA, Box 323, 4012 Bridge Ave., Cleveland, Ohio 44113.

Envelope Stuffing

\$1,000s WEEKLY POSSIBLE stuffing envelopes. Rush stamped envelope to: Success, Drawer 389, Clanton, Alabama 35045.

General Manager

Landscape and Lawn Maintenance firm. Experience and licensed in applying pesticides and fertilizers. Good salary and benefits. Hor-

tical background and some office experience preferred. Work with bush trimming. Will train. 517/337-7577.

Specialists Needed

Field Specialists, New Jersey region. \$20-\$25K. For more information, call 201/755-2812. EOE.

Management

Ever-Green Lawns Corporation, a division of the multi-national Hawley Group, Ltd. interested in discussing management opportunities with lawn care professionals looking for a change. Please respond in writing only to: Corporate Recruiting Manager, Ever-Green Lawns Corporation, 1390 Charlestown Industrial Drive, St. Charles, MO 63303

Manager Position

Aggressive person to be a working manager of established landscaping and lawn care company. Prefer person experienced in sales, landscaping and supervision. Owner semi-retiring. Send complete resume to Box 326 ALA, 4012 Bridge Ave., Cleveland, OH, 44113.

Positions Open

Growing landscape firm located in southwestern U.S. has openings for qualified Operations Director responsible for all landscape installation projects and qualified Maintenance Superintendent. Require minimum of seven (7) years commercial landscaping installation and/or maintenance management and outstanding supervisory skills. Degree in landscaping or related field desirable. Salary and benefits commensurate with experience. Send resume and salary needs to Landscaping, Box 25, 10231 N. Scottsdale Road, Scottsdale, AZ, 85253.

Manager Position

Quality conscious, Texas-based landscape management firm has immediate opening for detail-oriented Operations Manager and/or Business Manager. If you have outstanding professional, managerial and horticultural skills and are not afraid of hard and healthy team-

work, then you could qualify for a top position with the finest landscape firm in the southwest. Outstanding compensation and opportunity. Reply today to: ALA, Box 325, 4012 Bridge Ave., Cleveland, OH, 44113.

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Well-established lawn maintenance and landscape service featuring roof cleaning, light sprinkler repair and fertilizing. Contracts with major real estate companies. Known for quality service. Excellent growth for past five years. Major Texas location. -19023. International Business Exchange, P.O. Box 15046, Austin, TX, 78761. 512/339-0000.

Business

Lawn Spray business servicing approximately 5,000 accounts in Detroit metro area. Excellent routing. Low square footage. Good profit margin. Respond to: ALA, Box 327, 4012 Bridge Ave., Cleveland, OH, 44113.

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Every sprayer can benefit by reducing risk of toxic fumes, with do-it-yourself instructions. SASE and \$10. Durkee Spraying Service, Beaver, OK, 73932.

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