



OHIO STATE PROGRAM...

ONE YEAR ON

Greenkeeper, William Law, fondly recalls his placement year in The States...

At 15 years of age and with an interest in golf, my attention quickly turned to a career in greenkeeping during a brief stint working with four greenkeepers at Thetford Golf Club, Norfolk.

I was excited at the prospect of studying turf and I enrolled on a three-year Foundation Degree in Sporturf Science course at Myerscough College in September 2007.

The course allows a one year work placement year, so I took the decision to head to the States, wanting a big challenge and to help maintain a golf course to the highest possible standard. I didn't hesitate when the opportunity to join the Ohio State University Turfgrass Program came up starting in May 2007 for my placement year.

I had been given the chance to work at the Double Eagle Club, Ohio, with Golf Course Superintendent, Todd Voss. I flew out to Columbus, Ohio, for an orientation visit to Ohio State University

and after meeting Mike O'Keeffe and dotting the i's and cross the t's, I was also taken to the Jack Nicklaus Museum in Columbus, when half way round, Todd Voss from Double Eagle Club greeted me. I shook his hand, and my American adventure had started.

Before arriving at Double Eagle, I knew it was one of the best conditioned golf courses in the states and that it was to host a US Open Sectional Qualifying event only one week after I was to start. It struck me just how important attention to detail was, even in my first week. As the summer passed, the golf course missed almost every storm, as we went through one of the most driest summer's in the club's history.


In August I attended the 2007 Turfgrass & Landscape Research Field Day at The Ohio State University, gaining an insight into different experiments into the science of turf under different conditions. Another real benefit to being at Double

Eagle was that you were able to play golf after 4pm every day.

In late October, myself and every other intern on the program made our way down to South Carolina to attend short course seminars. I met many other interns from other golf courses, which proved to be great networking, a chance to relax and a great way to learn more about the industry. We also got a tour around Harbour Town Golf Course by Superintendent, Gary Snyder.

Days later, I began training at my second golf course in the States, FarmLinks Golf Course in Alabama. FarmLinks is unique, being the world's only research and demonstration golf course site. Mike O'Keeffe placed me here to support my degree course at Myerscough and gain a lot of experience with warm-season grasses.

FarmLinks brings in roughly 1200 Superintendents and turf professionals in groups of 10-15 from around the globe to evaluate,



test and exhibit the latest products that the turf industry has to offer. FarmLinks works closely with its three cornerstone partners, Agrium Advanced Technologies, BASF The Chemical Company and Toro. It's with these three companies that FarmLinks educate the tour groups on what is known as the "FarmLinks experience". Each intern based here is lucky enough to be invited to the experience and in my second week in Alabama I joined a group of Superintendents from Minnesota to discuss advanced fertiliser technologies and to get an insight as to what FarmLinks offer.

I was shown around laboratories where they collect some research from, attended fertiliser seminars by Agrium, discussed latest products brought out by Toro and learnt about the different pesticides, fungicides and fertilisers used by BASF. The tour group are taken on an "on the course tour" to be shown research carried out by the staff based at FarmLinks and are accommodated in

the lodge overlooking the 17th green.

Shortly after spending two days with the guys I was ready and excited for working at this world-class venue and learning as much as I could here in my internship.

I was here with six other interns from four different continents! Each intern was from the Ohio State Program and spoke very good English. Every one of us spent different periods of time on their internship, before moving on, and we all went away with great experience and knowledge to succeed in the industry. Accommodation was free and within easy access to work.

I must say it was very unusual at first to be surrounded by a golf course that was going into the transition of dormancy. Having only been only around cool-season grasses before, I had a lot of questions to ask. Would golfers enjoy playing on a course that appeared to be going yellow and how would our maintenance techniques differ?

FarmLinks boasts a variety of 27 different grass species on their 18-hole golf course, with mainly Tifsport Bermuda being the desired choice on fairways. There are 14 Bermuda grass fairways, three Zoysiagrass fairways and a seashore Paspalum fairway. All greens are A1/A4 creeping bentgrass, with the exception of the putting green (split up into three sections; L-93, A1/A4 and Pencross) and tees are all Tifsport Bermuda with the exception of several zoysia grass tees. Every winter all par-3 tees, driving range tee and a single fairway are overseeded with perennial ryegrass.

Every Tuesday the golf course was closed to work on essential maintenance projects. This usually meant we could top-dress greens and have them ready for play by Wednesday. FarmLinks is the only golf course in the states to have the original "DryJect" in their shed, a great machine but very costly! This also was a job reserved for Tuesdays throughout spring.

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Aerification week at FarmLinks was tiring but very enjoyable. The course was closed for two and a half days for all greens to be hollow-cored (5/8 inch tines, 2 inch spacing) and top-dressed. The greens measure 139,500 ft² and in three days the staff of 18 greenkeepers racked up 40 hours each. By the Thursday morning the greens were up to a putting standard after the top-dressing sand was “brushed-in” several times and watered. We did this in the second week of March.

All putting greens at FarmLinks are maintained to a perfect standard. They have little or no shade issues and most greens have giant fans close by so cool-air flows across the putting surface, relieving stress from the hot and humid summer’s in Alabama.

Also during the summer months FarmLinks uses the “Soil-Reliever”. This is a tractor mounted machine that is used solely on heavy traffic areas. The solid tines are 3/4 inch in diameter and the machine is used whenever possible to relieve compaction.

Interns at FarmLinks are trained on a range of tasks. All jobs are displayed on the lunch room board in the mornings and FarmLinks understand the importance of giving much of the training to interns. I was trained on mowing greens, tees, approaches and fairways. Also I sprayed

greens and fairways regularly, verticut fairways, aerified greens, changed holes and much more. Attention to detail is considered a major factor when preparing the golf course for play, like at Double Eagle.

Fairways and approaches are mown three times a week in late spring, greens are mown everyday and rough twice a week. Tees are also cut three times a week and bunkers are flymown once a week, usually on Tuesdays when there is no play.

At the end of May, my 12-month internship came to an end as I chose not to extend my J1 visa. When I left FarmLinks to return to the UK, the golf course had completely come out of dormancy and temperatures were approaching the 90’s. During my time in the states, the US Department of State changed the rules for interns in allowing them to return for internships as many times as they like, as long as he or she maintains their student status or be no more than one year after graduation.

Since my arrival back to the UK, I immediately started on a seasonal basis at Walton Heath, Surrey only four days after my last day at FarmLinks! I begin my last year on the Foundation Degree in September. I would encourage others thinking of a career path in turf to join the OSU program as it is well recognised and opens up many opportunities. My thanks go to Mike O’Keeffe, Todd Voss and

also Mark Langner, Director of Agronomy and Applied Research and David Deweese, Golf Course Superintendent at FarmLinks, for their efforts in the 12 months I was in The States.



Hilton Head Island Golf Course Superintendent, Todd Ross, with William Law

