

The facts are in — Golf courses add billions to economy while occupying relatively small acreage

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What is your golf course worth? According to an Economic Impact Survey conducted by the University of Florida, your golf course contributes its share to an \$8.6 billion Florida turfgrass industry each year! Golf courses contribute about 36 per cent of this total or slightly over \$3 billion annually.

This total does not include other facets of the turf industry, only those associated with management of the *golf* turf!

The findings of this survey have been long awaited by those who sought to validate the economic importance of the turfgrass industry to the state of Florida. The turf industry is such a widespread network of independent operations it has been treated like a stepchild compared to cattle, citrus and other united agricultural entities.

The numbers presented by Agricultural Finance Professor P. J. Blockland, the survey team leader, surprised even the most veteran turf managers attending last month's Florida Turfgrass Conference and Show held in Fort Lauderdale. Although these were only preliminary figures, Dr. Blockland does not an-

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ticipate any major adjustments in the final numbers.

The \$3 billion represents the annual cash expenditures for all labor, materials,

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equipment and services utilized in the maintenance of turfgrass. Professor Blockland said that was the equivalent of every working person in the state spending \$1,635, or each resident spending \$667.

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Hysteria about the acreage consumed by golf courses and their impact on the environment are misplaced when it was revealed that of the approximately 5 million acres of turfgrass under maintenance golf courses only occupy 149,000 acres. Household residences account for about 3.3 million acres. Additionally, schools (206,000 acres) and airports (163,000 acres) both maintain more acreage than the nation's leading golf course state.

Because golf courses are maintained as a daily recreational outlet with high performance expectations, they lead every category in annual expenditures per

acre at \$3,700, followed by sod producers at \$1,900 and residential lawns at \$1,200.

Consequently, golf courses had the biggest investment in non-land assets by the end of 1991 with a figure of \$7,300, compared to sod producers at \$1,300 and residential at \$383. This survey has shown that the turfgrass industry employs nearly three times the number of people working in traditional agriculture.

The importance of this survey is that it brings to the attention of our legislators the enormous impact the turfgrass and golf industries have on the state. Lawmakers who are ignorant of these facts can sometimes be misled by radical elements who portray golf as an elitist self serving pastime. Instead, it has revealed that turfgrass is a major factor in the state's economy.

Armed with this information, lawmakers can take a more educated look at rules, regulations, and proposals that

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unfairly attack and restrict such a now proven valuable commodity like the turfgrass industry.

The turfgrass industry does not seek special treatment, but it does demand a level playing field with full consideration for its financial as well as environmental contributions to the health and wealth of the state.