

Why do some superintendents support the Florida Turfgrass Association and others do not?

Let me state that I am a golf course superintendent, first, last, and always, and have been for the entire 26½ years since my graduation from the University of Florida. I have been a member of FTGA since 1972, a member of GCSAA since 1977, and a founding member of both the Central Florida and Palm Beach chapters. I am the current president of the FTGA and a past president of both the Palm Beach and the Florida Golf Course Superintendent Associations. Reciting my professional history, I hope, will give some credibility to the logic I employ in urging superintendents to support the FTGA.

The simple reason is that supporting the FTGA is the most practical way for Florida superintendents to help themselves. "Think globally

and act locally" applies more to Florida than any other state. Florida has a unique environment among the 50 states, and research done out of state may not be applicable to Florida conditions. While there are a few states that have strong and viable university turfgrass programs supported by strong and active industries, most do not, and many university turf programs are scaling back and deteriorating due to lack of support.

The University of Florida turfgrass program, on the other hand, is expanding as a direct response to our interest, support, and activism. It makes more sense for superintendents in other states to throw their support solely behind GCSAA or other large regional programs, just as it makes more sense for us to strongly support the University of Florida turfgrass program.

With more golf courses than any other state and nearly the most acreage of turfgrasses, Florida outstrips all the states in terms of potential. If we could just harness this potential, we could satisfy all our research requirements in

state, assuring their validity to our conditions. This does not mean we should not support the GCSAA and its initiatives; it just means that it is more likely that we will get useful and relevant research working with Florida scientists than it does sending our money out of state and hoping it may come back one day to help us. Let's be very selective about the types of programs we send our hard-earned money to outside the state of Florida.

So why work with non-golf turfgrass professionals? Again, the answer is practicality.

Besides research, education, and fellowship with peers, the other reason we bind together in associations is to have some influence with lawmakers. GCSAA is looking out for us on national issues. At the state level, we have to look out for ourselves, and when dealing with lawmakers and politicians, size does matter! We have a much bigger stick when we are aligned with the other turfgrass professionals like lawn care companies, sports turf managers, and sod producers, parks and cemeteries and pest control companies than we do as a very small group of Florida golf course superintendents.

Doesn't this sometimes result in conflicts of interest, or dilution of superintendents' efforts? I've sometimes used the expression "wearing two hats" when talking about my service to either the FGCSA or the FTGA, but I now regard this as a mistake, as some people have interpreted this to mean that there may be a conflict of interest in regards to actions taken or decisions made.

There is no conflict of interest, and I see no potential conflict of interest of any significance in the future, as we work to strengthen our ties with non-golf turfgrass professionals through the FTGA. Superintendent concerns are not compromised, but instead are enhanced and given greater chance of success by working with turfgrass professionals in related fields. Yes, disagreements about the best course of action to take for the benefit of all FTGA members can and will occur, but no more so than currently occurs among the superintendent members of the FGCSA board of directors. Intelligent and

Getting the Big Picture

Mark My Words



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ORDINANCE

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backwoods, good ol' boy network. The county crafted some ordinances such as the anti-nudity ordinance which have stood the test of the courts, and have been utilized by other counties as templates in creating their own similar ordinances. I assure you, whether this ordinance passes or not, other county governments will be considering similar measures to deal with their local problems.

So why did they single out lawns? Well, at this time agriculture is exempt from much and the Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association is one of the most powerful agricultural lobbies in the country. The GCSAA and the FTGA in recent years have presented an impressive showing and shown golf courses in a positive light. Audubon International and its certified golfcourses are showing everyone that golf courses are becoming sustainable habitats for both wildlife and man. So if you can't touch agriculture, and golf courses are the friends of nature,

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then homeowners must be polluting everything, right? Not!

How many turf managers are concerned about the quality of water leaving their property? Do we test our water for nitrogen and phosphorous loading? Have we amended our practices when applying fertilizers to prevent it from reaching water bodies? Do we even know if we are part of the problem?

Suppose there are 1200 golf courses in Florida (the number changes daily, it seems). Of those 1200, 295 (24.58%) are enrolled in the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary and Signature Programs. Of those, only 47 (3.91%) are certified.

What about the rest?

One of the key components of the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program is water quality. Test your water to see if you are impairing the quality of the water leaving your property, and then do something about it. If you do not have proof that you are not impairing the quality of the water, what is going to stop them from taking your fertilizer away next?

The turfgrass industry will not survive into the future as it has in the past. Either you can do your part to improve the industry and its practices, or you can sit back and watch it be taken away. Be thankful if you are not in this part of St. Johns County, but this or something similar is soon coming to a neighborhood near you!

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JARRELL

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dedicated professionals usually know more than one way to skin a cat.

I have yet to see an issue before the FTGA board that pitted one segment of the turfgrass industry against the other; but I have seen issues where a cooperative effort, and/or the actions of non-golf turf professionals, have resulted in a benefit to the golf course industry. Examples include FTGA Vice President Erica Santella of TruGreen-Chemlawn representing us at nitrate leaching workshops and posting/ notification hearings; FTGA Director Tom Benefield looking out for our

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water interests; Emerald Island Turf

feeding us all at field days and various other supplier members serving on committees and working in the trenches for the good of all.

As for research funding, each group comprising FTGA membership realizes that they exert control over how their donations are used. Money raised by a superintendent chapter is not going to fund a soccer field hardness study or any other non-golf related project unless the superintendents request it.

Superintendents give up nothing by supporting the FTGA, but stand to gain a lot. We have a unique opportunity in Florida to set the standards for the rest of the country — let's take advantage of it!