Other Shoe Drops: IFAS Budget Cuts Go Deeper

By Donald Benham

The University of Florida has been told to cut another $2 million after already cutting its budget by $2.1 million. Dr. Mike Martin, vice president for agriculture and natural resources, has sent a letter outlining the new reductions. In other words, the other shoe has dropped. Several of these reductions will have direct, immediate effect on all of us. For example the closing of three RECs, restructuring of two more, closures and restructuring of selected campus research programs. To quote Dr. Martin “Be forewarned, we will have to reduce or eliminate programs, if we are to keep our commitment to excellence and some very productive, loyal and long-serving staff members will be laid off.”

Did you know that Ft. Lauderdale REC is part of the group being looked at for restructuring or closure? What can we do about it? Obviously writing, E-mailing or faxing your local legislator lets them know how you feel. Talk to your board of directors and general manager. You probably have some very influential members in your club.

There is a third way: encouraging your board of directors and general manager to have your membership join “Golfers for a Better Environment.” To refresh your memory, the $5-a-member program is jointly promoted by the University of Florida and the FTGA. We cannot replace the large monetary reduction caused by state budget cuts, but by encouraging your club to join the $5-a-member program for turfgrass research, we can accomplish two things: First we obviously gain more research money for needed projects with the faculty of the University of Florida. Secondly, and we gain political clout to go to the Legislature for matching funds.

If 25 clubs with an average membership of 500 were to join this spring, 12,500 voting members would be contributing. Take it a step further. If only 25 clubs from each coast joined for a total of 50 clubs, that is 25,000 registered voters supporting turfgrass research in Florida. I am not saying we could save a particular REC like Ft. Lauderdale, but I am saying we might gain support in the Legislature to promote our turf research with a line item to do it. Politicians listen to numbers of voters. Think about it - only 25 clubs on each coast.

On a happier note, I just returned this morning from a wonderful day at Jonathan’s Landing on Friday, Nov. 30. Thanks to General Manager Peter Young, Club President Paul Moore, the board of directors and Michael J. Perham, GCCS director of course maintenance, Jonathan’s Landing presented FTGA President R. Alan Puckett and me with a $6,500 check representing $10 a member from 650 members.

The presentation was made at the official opening of the redesigned “Village” course at the recommendation of Jan Beljan, associate designer of Fazio Golf. I was invited to play the opening round tournament with the club president and general manager. There was a lot of friendly protest when we won the tournament. The FTGA was enthusiastically thanked for its promotion of this grassroots member program. Please see the enclosed letter from the club.

Dr. Terril Nell of the University of Florida and I would be happy to come to your club and explain the program to your club officials. Donald R Benham is director of public relations, Florida Turfgrass Association; 501 Washington Blvd., Suite 201; Sarasota, FL 34236; phones 941-355-7679; fax 407-896-6857; rbendham@aol.com

NEW DISEASE IMPACTING POA TRIVIALIS OVERSEEDING

A new patch disease has been making its presence known these days in the SE Region on overseeded bermudagrass putting greens. Dr. Bruce Martin has identified two known cases at the Clemson-Pee Dee Research Station. The new disease has been identified as belonging to the chytridomycete fungal group. Dr. Larry Stowell www.paceptri.com/PTR/DocumentLibrary/Diseases/0111.pdf of PACE Consulting originally diagnosed the disease on the West Coast in 1995 at golf courses in Nevada and Arizona. USGA agronomists have seen the disease at Carolina coastal golf courses over the past few years, but never knew the cause of the problem.

The disease impacts Poa trivialis, Poa annua, and perennial ryegrass. It really wipes out Poa trivialis, by far the most popular overseeded turf now on putting greens in the SE Region. The disease resembles the pythium fungus as the turf looks water soaked prior to death along with dime-size spots. The disease tracks along with the mowers and can attack in the both the fall and spring. It is spread by zoospores like Pythium, but the organisms live inside the leaf cells, which is one reason why it has been so tough to identify in the past.

The common denominator at sites with this new disease problem has been poor water and soil quality. The disease operates best with soil or water conditions of high EC, high salinity, and high bicarbonates. It is especially prevalent during droughts (just like we are experiencing now) and at sites without an aggressive soil amendment and flushing program.

From what is known, every variety of Poa trivialis is impacted. Ryegrass is affected as through September.