Mark My Words

Food for Thought…and the Economy

By Mark Jarrell, CGCS

The economic “down-turn,” if that is the appropriate word to describe what the country has experienced for the past few years, has not hit Florida as hard as it has most of the other states. One big reason is because the agriculture and natural resource sectors - those industries served by IFAS research and extension, which includes turf management - performed better than any other major sector of Florida’s $484 billion economy during this period.

Between 2001 and 2003 personal income in Florida increased by 7.6 percent compared to 4.8 percent for the rest of the country. Of 22 major industry sectors of Florida’s economy surveyed during this period, only management of companies and enterprises (27 percent), exceeded farms (26.2 percent) in personal income growth. I don’t know quite what to think about these numbers that were generated by a recent University of Florida/IFAS economic impact study.

My long history of working through FTGA and FGCSA committees with IFAS has been continuous frustration that our legislature cuts the IFAS budget year after year, failing to recognize that agriculture and natural resources are the heart and soul of Florida and its economy. No matter what a governor or a group of legislators would like Florida to become, ignoring what it is just never made any sense to me.

Kados go to all those working in the green industries, who have performed so well despite the lack of support by those who write legislation and set state budgets. My question is how long can this strong performance go on as IFAS continues to be hamstrung by dreamers and urban legislators who’ve never had dirt under their fingernails?

While trying to attract more high-tech industry, with its higher incomes, to our state is a worthwhile goal, it would seem to be an intelligent strategy to ensure that the industries that are currently serving the needs of the people of this state are protected and supported. Agriculture and natural resource industries - which include such diverse enterprises as citrus, forestry, seafood, sugarcane, vegetables, ornamentals, and turf - generate about $62 billion in output impacts ($31 billion in value-added impacts). About 650,000 people work in these industries, generating $19 billion in labor income and nearly $3 billion in indirect business taxes. Florida’s unemployment rate hovers around 5.1 percent, while California is at 6.6 percent, North Carolina is 6.1 percent, Oregon is 8.2 percent, Colorado is 5.8 percent, Massachusetts is 5.5 percent, and Washington is at 7.3 percent - states specifically pursuing economic development strategies based on high tech industries.

The diversity of Florida’s agriculture and natural resource industries is impressive - not only do we have more golf courses than any other state, but our citrus, seafood processing, and at least nine other crops are tops in the nation. While this diversity gives our economy a stability and balance that other states don’t have, it also makes it difficult to secure private research and development investment - 12 million acres of corn in Iowa will attract more investment than our 850,000 acres of citrus. One would think our legislators would recognize the value of this diversity to the stability of our economy and try to nurture and preserve it by increasing the investment in the kind of research and extension that IFAS does so well, rather than continuing year after year to decrease it.

As for tourism, am I just being simple-minded, or is it just common sense to think that people visit or move to Florida because of our great weather, water, beaches, fishing, golf courses, and green spaces? Yes, we have Disney World and other attractions, but so do other states. I love visiting San Francisco, but when I jump in the car I want to see Napa Valley, not Silicon Valley. Let’s hope that Mike Martin can find a way to make this message resonate with the powers in Tallahassee.

As it Lies

The Times They Are a’ Changing

By Jim Walker

A couple of years ago, players on the PGA Tour, European Tour and Senior PGA Tour were asked what was the single most important advancement which has led to the superior quality of play today. Most people expected the answer to be new and better clubs and balls or the conditioning of the players who are stronger and in much better shape, or a combination of those factors. To everyone’s surprise, the answer almost to a man was the condition of the turf being so much better today than it was in the 50’s, 60’s or even the 70’s.

Each decade has brought new and better varieties of grass, safer and more effective pesticides and sophisticated mowers and supporting equipment.

A visit from the state DEP inspector several weeks ago made me think of the strides our industry has made in the last 30-odd years that I have been in the business. Not only have we made giant steps forward with our mowing and cultural practice equipment, and grass types, but more importantly, we have made even bigger steps in the use and application of pesticides. Superintendents have become environmental stewards and, as such, the players, workers and applicators are safer because of it. The environment, the non-golfing public, and our wildlife are in much less peril than back in the good old days.

I am most pleased that future generations of golf course workers will be less at risk because of some of the pesticides which were removed from the market. Furthermore, I am pleased that all the aforementioned non-golfers, wildlife, and the environment in general are also less at risk.

Don’t get me wrong, I’m not saying everything we did back then was unsafe or wrong, but there is no doubt that where we are now is much better than where we were then.

Just think of how much more effective it is to spot-spray Sencor or Revolver for goose grass than to boom spray MSMA. How much better we are now that we apply pre-emergent herbicides for grassy and broadleaf weeds than to have to make all those post-emergent applications?

What a wonderful day it was when we could apply one fungicide to address all our fungal problems than to spray this for that and that for this, and on and on it went!

How much better off are we with grasses that tolerate 1/2-inch to 3/8-inch mowing heights...
on fairways and dwarf varieties of putting green grasses being mowed at .150-inch or less on a regular basis with minimal damage?

How much easier is it now to aerify greens and pick up the debris with a core processor rather than a crew with shovels and trap rakes turned upside down?

What did we do before trap rakes that groomed bunkers with one man in just a few hours in most cases?

Isn’t it wonderful to verticut or groom during the growing season with ease, and then to dust the greens with our rotary top dressers?

How difficult is it to keep level tees now? Dude, just call the contractor and have him laser level them every couple of years!

How about fertigation? Fertilize every night when you water!

One Adam Twelve, see the man on the two-ton truck broadcasting 5 tons of fertilizer an hour! I watched with amazement as that same device - and one like it - put out 650 tons of top dressing on four soccer fields in less than four hours. How long would have that taken with a couple of walking Turfco top dressers?

I could go on for a while longer now that I’m on a roll but no need beating a dead tree or a dead tree hugger or a young superintendent who doesn’t know where this industry has come from. Trust me. We’ve come a long way, baby, and hopefully still have a long way to go.

Who knows, maybe someday we will see a grass that needs no water, food, mowing or other tending to. I guess that’s not really likely since grass is a living organism and all living things need a little TLC from folks like us.

**Leadership - A Learned Behavior**

*By Bruce R. Williams, CGCS*

Early in my career I learned from some great mentors.

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This is part three of presenting the four category winners of the 2003 photo contest.

**First Place - “Lake Bank Plantings”** by Trevor Brinkmeyer, Shadow Wood CC, Naples

**Second Place - “Fountain Grass along No. 4 Tee”** by Tom Biggy, Bent Tree CC, Sarasota

**Category 3 - Native Areas**
2004 Photo Contest Categories

**Category 1 - Wildlife on the course:** includes any critter on the course that walks, flies, swims, slithers or crawls.

**Category 2 - Formal Landscaping:** includes annuals and ornamental shrubs and trees planted in formal beds on the course or club entrance.

**Category 3 - Native Areas:** includes beds of native plants including trees, shrubs and grasses used in naturalized areas to reduce turf inputs and aquatic vegetation plantings used to create habitat and protect water quality.

**Category 4 - Scenic Hole:** includes any view of a golf hole (panoramic or close up) that demonstrates the scenic beauty of a golf course.

**Easy Rules**

1. Color prints or slides. Prefer prints. Only one entry per category. Digital images: Digital image entries must be taken at a resolution setting of 300 dpi or higher and saved as JPEG or TIF format images. Images taken, saved and sent at lower resolutions will not qualify for the contest. If you’re not sure, send a print instead.

2. Photo must be taken on an FGCSA member’s course. Photo must be taken by an FGCSA member or a member of his staff.

3. Attach a label on the back of the print or slide which identifies the category, course and photographer. DO NOT WRITE DIRECTLY ON THE BACK OF THE PRINT. Each print shall be attached to an 8.5” x 11” sheet of paper using a loop of masking tape on the back of the print. Slides should be in plastic sleeves for easy access for viewing. Digital images must be accompanied by the same information in an email or document on a CD.

4. A caption identifying the category, course and photographer should be typed or printed on the sheet of paper below the mounted print.

5. Judging will be done by a panel of FGCSA members not participating in the contest.

6. Mail entries in a bend-proof package marked “PHOTOS DO NOT BEND” to Joel Jackson, 6780 Tamarind Circle, Orlando, 32819. Entries postmarked after August 1, 2003 will be automatically entered in the 2004 Photo Contest.
“the superintendent and his staff did a nice job this week” uttered by Tim Finchem. Meanwhile, one doofus was praising the PGA Tour officials acting as referees for the matches as the nuts and bolts that make this thing happen. Say what?

Birdies to the Georgia Golf Course Superintendents Association and the Cactus and Pines GCSCA in Arizona for getting their golf course owners associations, club managers associations and state golf associations together to work on the issues facing golf. Awesome.

Birdies and Double Bogeys to the golf course owners in Florida who can’t even support their own Chapter of the NGCOA. Maybe when the GCSCA and NGCOA get together in Orlando in February 2005 for the new Golf Industry Conference and Show they will get the hint.

Birdies to the North Carolina Legislature. It took the Turf Council of North Carolina and their supporters like the Carolinas GCSA awhile, but they got $650,000 budgeted to go to the turf-grass center at North Carolina State University annually. If they can respond to a $2.5 billion dollar turf industry like that, just think what Florida should get at $4.4 billion.

Triple bogeys to the governor of South Carolina. Word is that his state budget proposal cuts out all funding to Clemson University’s turf and ornamental programs including extension. Has this guy ever heard of Myrtle Beach? Got to give a bogey to our Florida legislature with their annual budget cuts to IFAS. Agriculture has helped pull Florida through the slow economy, and for that they get sucker punched.

Birdies to all certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary courses. Thanks for being proactive and a good example of golf’s environmental stewardship, and an eagle to the superintendents paying the ACSP dues out of their own pocket.

Triple bogey to the club that won’t cough up the $150 annual dues. I’m embarrassed for you. What is it, one buck per golfer? And bogeys to the rest of the clubs that just don’t get it. We’re in tough environmental times and this program can help you and the whole Industry. Get on board.

Birdies to the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS). They get it. They know agriculture is the state’s most reliable economic performer during good and bad times. They seek scientific answers to issues and don’t let rhetoric muddy the picture. Plus they work with all stakeholders on the issues.

Bogey to the county health official spreading the story of a baby’s death in New England from trace amounts of arsenic in the tap water. Turns out it was homicide and intentional poisoning. Arsenic is a serious issue, but let’s deal with facts and not misinformation.

Birdies to all of you dedicated guys and gals out there in golf maintenance. Nobody really knows how much you care or how hard you try to give the people what they want.

But I have to throw a bogey on your score card if you aren’t also making the case for your value to the club. If you aren’t following a business plan or communicating frequently with the movers and shakers then you are risking disqualification.

In the real game of golf there are no mulligans.