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President's Message

As the new President of the Florida Golf Course Superintendents' Association, I welcome the distinct pleasure of addressing my colleagues through this message. Please accept my comments constructively, not critically.

Undoubtedly the results of a whipping can be considered controversial. Many times in a horse race the jockey is accused of using the whip too much or too little. I trust you can stand one more exhortation on the need to join an organization and possibly transform the power of that whip from a device of punishment to one of attention and identification.

I am not a true believer in becoming part of an organization just to be another name on the roster, but we are playing an important numbers game. Without a doubt, the legislature, manufacturers, environmentalists, or any controlling or regulatory group will listen to 1,000 voices more intently than 10. The performance has been chosen, the stage has been set, now it is time for the cast to act -- you and I individually and collectively. It is up to ALL of us to join forces -- stand up and be counted. You supposedly have chosen the turf industry for good reasons. Now support it. Become an active part of your livelihood. Invest in your present and future.

Join your local Superintendents' Association and expose yourself to "grass roots" education -- what is being done in your backyard. As part of the state association you contribute, through numbers, to the sting of the whip. Lend a "Big Brother" hand to the turf industry at large by joining forces through the Florida Turf Grass Association. And as a member of G.C.S.A.A. you collectively impart support to and have an impact on Federal decisions concerning matters which effect our environmentally oriented business.

I believe all of us can afford the dues even, if necessary, out of own pocket. Perhaps it is difficult to see or feel a direct "in the hand" benefit of these investments -- but they are worthwhile and your future depends on your present action.

You are important. We need you even if you think you don't need us. Become an active member of the mentioned associations.

Bill Wagner
The Florida Green

The Official Bulletin of the Florida Golf Course Superintendents Association
Florida Green Phone: Days — (305) 793-0069

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ABOUT OUR COVER

Severe infestation of sodweb worms on a green.
Picture was taken after application of primicid at two quarts per acre.

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A New Biblical Plague?

By Michael Satchell

The battle erupts in Texas. After years of being under control, a generation of insects begins multiplying in fantastic numbers — suddenly unaffected by the chemical weapons that have kept them in check. Farmers get panicky, some spraying their fields as many as 50 times with powerful insecticides, but it has little effect.

After devouring much of the Texas cotton crop, the insects march into northern Mexico, gobbling up a million more acres of cotton, wiping out an entire industry, and leaving the land wasted and barren.

Newer and more exotic poisons are thrown at them but serve only to slow the insects down. After shaking off the new assault, the voracious hordes regroup and sweep into Louisiana, eating a quarter of that state’s cotton crop. Temporarily sated, they head west to California, bringing terror to the lush Imperial Valley, America’s vegetable bowl.

Here, the crawling, wriggling juggernaut begins by chomping its way through some 5 billion pounds of lettuce — three quarters of the nation’s crop. It all seems lost until a last-ditch defense with another new poison thwarts the assault. America’s salad bowls are safe this year, but the victory may be only temporary. Where will the monster bugs strike next?

This may sound like the scenario of a Hollywood horror movie, but the saga of the budworm (which is equally happy eating tobacco, cotton, lettuce and tomatoes — plus DDT, toxaphene, methyl parathion and other powerful insecticides) is very real. Last winter’s California lettuce crop was saved only after authorities agreed to the emergency use of a highly toxic and largely untested pyrethroid chemical. In time, scientists believe, the budworm will develop immunity to this poison too.

The budworm is just one of 364 so-called “superbugs” worldwide that have developed resistance to the witches’ cauldron of poisons used to destroy them or keep them in check. They are the shock troops of a global insect army locked in constant combat with man, challenging us for our food and fiber supplies and bringing death, disease and discomfort to millions, particularly in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Viewed in terms of war, it is the insects that are on the offensive. “They are beginning to tip the scales in their favor,” warns Dr. Paul Schwartz, a U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) entomologist. “The potential for disaster is always present — in agriculture or in disease.”

The United Nations Environment Program, in its recent
(Continued on Page 7)
State of the World report, noted with alarm the rapid gains made by insects, mites, ticks, rodents, weeds and fungi in becoming increasingly resistant to pesticides. This poses a grave threat to world health and food production.

Of the 364 superbugs, 223 are agricultural pests that attack crops in the fields or after the harvest. The remaining 141 spread disease to livestock or humans — flies, ticks, cockroaches, lice and mosquitoes.

In the last two years, the U.S. has been invaded by exploding populations of pests. Plagues of grasshoppers almost Biblical in size have blanketed and denuded millions of acres of crop and range lands in 14 states west of the Missouri River.

In Maine, millions — perhaps billions — of tent caterpillars have been defoliating trees and invading homes. Gypsy moths have stripped half a million acres of Pennsylvania forest and are spreading south into the Blue Ridge Mountains. Colorado is losing 2 million Ponderosa pines each year on the eastern slopes of the Rockies due to pine beetle infestation. Elsewhere, record numbers of borers, rootworms, bollworms, cutworms, webworms, hoppers, miners, loopers, beetles and weevils are decimating crops, making life miserable for farmers and homeowners, and causing millions of dollars in losses.

Overseas, the effects on food supplies and public health are even more drastic as the insect hordes gather momentum. Locusts — bigger and more voracious cousins of the grasshopper — have swarmed across Africa and parts of Asia, eating everything from crops to wooden fence posts. Increasing resistance to insecticides is being shown by major pests that attack crops on which entire agricultural economies are based — rice in Japan, coconuts in tropical Africa, cattle in Australia, cereals everywhere.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has charted an alarming rise in malaria after seeing the disease dramatically reduced in recent years by effective new insecticides. But the mosquitoes have been highly successful in blunting these attacks by developing immunity. So far, 43 species that carry malaria — plus 41 species that transmit dengue, yellow fever and a host of dread tropical diseases — have developed resistance.

This country also faces a constant threat from mosquito-borne disease. Without expensive, continuing control programs, coastal areas of Florida and some Southern states would be uninhabitable. Dr. Donald Weidhaas, director of a USDA research laboratory in Gainesville, Fla., worries about the increasing resistance trend.

"We’re lucky we can afford these expensive methods to combat the problem. The developing countries cannot," he says. "The potential is here for malaria and encephalitis; already we’re seeing dengue and yellow fever turn up in Caribbean countries."

Changes in climate, different methods of agriculture and the banning of certain insecticides for environmental reasons are all contributing to the burgeoning insect populations. But resistance to chemicals — our first line of attack and defense — is the major and most worrisome reason.
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In others, tiny amounts of the sex lure are spread in thin plastic tubes. "The males are attracted to the tubes and spent their time trying to mate with the plastic instead of the female," chuckled one government scientist. "It must get pretty frustrating."

Similar methods are being tested for pests that bother humans, though introducing predator insects into an apartment building plagued with cockroaches is hardly feasible. Entomologists advise that the best method of combating insects and rodents around the house remains a simple one: don't leave garbage about.

Despite all the modern weapons at our disposal in the continuing conflict with insects, this country still loses 30 to 40 percent of its food and fiber supplies to pests. On a global scale, almost half of the world's crops are eaten or destroyed by rodents, bugs and weeds. Since insects outnumber use and are far more adaptable and theoretically able to breed resistance to any kind of poison that we can invent, the end result of our age-old battle with them is inevitable.

Superbugs and superpests will eventually take over the earth, just like in some Hollywood movie. A disturbing thought, but hardly something to worry about in our lifetime — unless, perhaps, the budworm eats its way out of America's farmlands and starts showing up alongside the cockroach in our cupboards and kitchens.

USGA Regional Meeting

The United States Golf Association, Green Section, Southeastern Region will hold their next regional meeting Monday, February 23, 1981 at the Holiday Inn-Lakeside, Boca Raton. The motel is immediately west of the Boca Raton exit from the Florida Turnpike. Plan to attend this all day session. South Florida Chapter and Palm Beach Chapter will not hold February meetings because of this event. Registration fee is $15 which includes lunch.

A wide range of subjects will interest golf management people of all levels. To be discussed in the morning session are the USGA and its role in the game of golf. Other subjects are golf etiquette, trends in golf facilities, integrated pest management — weed control, performance — evaluation of Bermbuda species, the manager's role with the golf course. The afternoon session subjects are: importance of course housekeeping, coping with traffic, vandalism, bermuda green mutation in the superintendent management program and conditioning the course for play. The afternoon session highlight will be a rare appearance by cytogeneticist Dr. Wayne Hanna of the Tifton Georgia Coastal Plain Experiment Station. His topic will be contamination in greens — the Pee Dee Syndrome.
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