Seed firms: Gov't cost us $1M

BY MARK LESLIE

Not satisfied with the mere "regrets" of the U.S. Department of Agriculture for a snafu that cost his company $200,000, Sonny Pennington of Pennington Enterprises Inc. is on the verge of suing the USDA.

Pennington's Madison, Ga., firm is one of seven seed companies that absorbed a total $1 million loss when 2 million pounds of tall fescue seed imported from Argentina were found to contain a noxious weed, serrated tussock, and the seed was ordered recalled.

Pennington says he will decide by early August whether he would sue the government, but first he would seek an audience with Secretary of Agriculture Clayton Yeutter.

"We're attempting to go through Congress rather than lawyers," Pennington said. "Congressmen work cheaper than lawyers.

“My attorney says that to sue government it's going to cost $200,000 in attorney fees. I can sue and possibly win $250,000 and it will cost me $200,000. That's all we sue for simply our loss. It appears that if we sue — and it appears we probably will have to — we'll sue for loss of reputation, loss of business."

An irate Greg Fennels of Olson Fennels Seed in Oregon, which also absorbed a

Possible cure found for cricket

BY LARRY KIEFFER

After four years of testing in pastureland by researchers with the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, "the most promising biological control agent for mole crickets we have ever had" is ready for field trials at 20 Florida golf courses.

"Everything looks extremely promising as far as finally having something we can brag about," said Bob Rebberg, chairman of the Florida Turfgrass Association's research awards committee. What Rebberg and the FTGA are bragging about is a Uruguayan nematode that carries a bacterium "at least four times more virulent on the mole cricket than some of the other materials that have been pulled in from commercial organizations."

The microscopic nematode crawls in the mole cricket's mouth, infects it with the lethal bacteria, and then crawls out before the insect dies "within one to several days."

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Eureka! Golf gold being mined

1989 is prime time for nation's builders

BY MARK LESLIE

This is the best of times for golf course builders.

A short while ago, Golf Course Builders Association Executive Director Don Rossi said: "There's no way to buy the land, build a golf course, and make money except to charge exorbitant fees -- unless the land is given to you -- because the cost of the land is so, so expensive."

Poof! Suddenly real-estate developers are giving the land away to golf course builders because the developers want a golf course to attract home buyers but don't want to get involved in something they're not expert in.

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Beware snags, but money can be found

BY KATHY BISSELL

Getting a golf course from dream to reality requires at least as many complex maneuvers as getting a team to the Super Bowl.

It takes money, talent and time. Because more people want to play golf, because research reports from groups such as the National Golf Foundation say we need more courses, and because people seem to think there's a lot of money to be made, many individuals and developers want to take the plunge into golf course development.

The difficulties are knowing how to get the funds to start and how to make a project
Golf course architect William Amick of Daytona Beach, Fla., lists 18 ways to save money building a course.

Amick, a member of the American Society of Golf Course Architects, suggests that a developer:

1) Lease land for a course on a long-term basis from a government agency, which will subdivide the area along with a private land owner, or receive the land free from a developer who wants fairway frontage without operating a golf course. "Any of these methods will substantially reduce startup costs," Amick says. "Developers should seriously consider giving enough land to an individual or group to build and operate a course. Government agencies have to contend with high interest payments and land costs. And if you charge a nickel more for a cup of coffee, the public cries."-Don Rossi

Beford Courses are charging more and more, and the golfing public is indeed paying those higher fees.

There are still factors to beware of — from restrictive environmental laws to overloading an area with courses — but circumventing those higher fees.

Consider building an executive or par 3 course to save land, reduce construction costs, and make maintenance dollars go further. "These types of courses can fit the playing abilities of a large portion of golfers," Amick says. "Middle- and high-handicap golfers, women, seniors, young people, beginners, occasional golfers, people with a limited amount of playing time, and those who wan to sharpen their iron play or short game."

7) If housing will surround the course, have the golf course architect design it in complete coordination with a site planner.

8) Building a moderate rather than over-plush clubhouse — one to fit the needs of the facility — and a few other recreational facilities will permit holding golf fees lower, Amick says.

9) Construct as many small tees, fairways and greens as possible, "which will be fair to golfers and handle traffic," he says.

10) Use low-profile tees, mounds and bunkers. "This will decrease costly earth movement, if done properly, can be attractive," he adds.

11) Make sure that the irrigation system — a big-dollar item — is planned and installed properly.

12) Don't clear, plant or maintain parts of the rough away from regular play. Leave those areas natural.

13) Add some of the less essential features later, after the course is open and revenue has started coming in. Such features might be car paths, tree planting, and some of the sand traps.

Would-be developers should be warned: Many variables decide whether a course will be a success.

-- Don Rossi

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