Inexperience brings odd attempts at disease cures

By Vern Putney

The absence of local agronomy expertise has led to strange maintenance practices and a 'learn as you go' attitude in Asia, according to turfgrass and agronomy expert Neil Noble.

Noble has encountered the bizarre in his travels the last few years, first as director of turfgrass for Dye Designs International and now as president of Environmental Turfgrass Systems, Inc. in Honolulu, Hawaii, U.S.A.

"Many of the newer courses have tried to import grasses, construction and maintenance techniques from the United States only to see them fail," he said. "I visited one greenskeeper who had read in an American turfgrass text that frequent top dressing would improve putting greens. He top dressed this greens hourly every week. After a short time, he had completely buried the grass. Only the tips of the grass blades were visible. "There also is the idea that if a 10-inch per hour percolation rate is good for greens in California or Arizona, a 50-inch percolation rate would be most suitable for Indonesia, since it receives five times the precipitation," Noble added. "The result in this case was putting greens that did not hold enough moisture in the rooting zone to get through one day of evapotranspiration. The sand held no nutrients, as the huge quantities of irrigation water needed to keep the grass alive also leached the applied nutrients from the rooting zone."

He said: "There is a real low level of expertise. People play here and want to develop their golf courses in Indonesia and Asia. But there is no one with a background in growing grasses. Hybrid Bermudagrasses are being sold to these new golf developments, he said, "without any information as to how they differ from the native grasses." Again, the result is failure or at least less-than-expected results.

Many of the newer courses have tried to import grasses, construction and maintenance techniques from the United States only to see them fail. "But there is no one with a background in growing grasses. Hybrid Bermudagrasses are being sold to these new golf developments, he said, "without any information as to how they differ from the native grasses." Again, the result is failure or at least less-than-expected results."

GRASSES SITE-SPECIFIC

He said seed companies, without any concept of the climate, are selling cool-season grasses in Taiwan. "It's real site-specific—with microclimates everywhere in Japan and Korea. But in Thailand, Taiwan, Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore, anything from Bermudagrasses to Kentucky bluegrass is about all you see," he said.

Noble, who has lived and worked in Japan for three years, sees greater future opportunities in Taiwanese companies in Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and Guam.

While less developed than Japan, these countries are much easier to work in, he said, "partly because of protectionism in Japan and the fact that Singapore business can readily be done in English."

He cited a great need for the expertise of American contractors to fill the needs of course construction boom. "Draw a 500-mile circle around Singapore and there is a 500-course potential," he said. "Probably 200 will be built in the next four or five years. Thailand went from zero to 50 courses in construction in two years. "The islands in Asia have six, eight, 10 courses in play or under construction on each one. The Japanese who can't afford to build in Japan or Hawaii go to Indonesia and buy half an island, build a resort and two golf courses for half the cost of building 18 holes in Japan."

Yet, although there are tremendous opportunities to design, build, and sell products and services in this region, there are pitfalls.

Golf course architects, fertilizers and chemical suppliers, irrigation designers, equipment and product suppliers must address "how their products and services fit into new cultures and climates," Noble said. "Nowhere in the United States, for instance, are there monsoons or regular three-inch per hour rainstorms; and few places have volcanic soils."

LOCAL EPAS

Noble said new government environmental agencies are starting to affect development. The new Environmental Protection Agency in Taiwan recently announced it was going to begin monitoring golf course maintenance practices in the drinking watershed areas, and if they were found to be contributing substantially to pollution, they would be closed.

This agency also recommended that no new courses should be developed in the watershed areas, a decision that "is having a big impact as there are developers planning courses in those areas," Noble said.

Concern over ground water has the Guam EPA "leaning toward required ground- and surface-water monitoring for new courses that is estimated to cost nearly $1 million per course per year," he said. "This cost, if enforced, is more than enough to stop development of several new courses."

As a result of that Guam action, a group of planners and developers have asked Noble to help them devise plans any concept of the climate, are selling cool-season grasses in Taiwan. "It's real site-specific—with microclimates everywhere in Japan and Korea. But in Thailand, Taiwan, Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore, anything from Bermudagrasses to Kentucky bluegrass is about all you see," he said.

Noble, who has lived and worked in Japan for three years, sees greater future opportunities in Taiwanese companies in Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and Guam.

While less developed than Japan, these countries are much easier to work in, he said, "partly because of protectionism in Japan and the fact that Singapore business can readily be done in English."

He cited a great need for the expertise of American contractors to fill the needs of course construction boom. "Draw a 500-mile circle around Singapore and there is a 500-course potential," he said. "Probably 200 will be built in the next four or five years. Thailand went from zero to 50 courses in construction in two years. "The islands in Asia have six, eight, 10 courses in play or under construction on each one. The Japanese who can't afford to build in Japan or Hawaii go to Indonesia and buy half an island, build a resort and two golf courses for half the cost of building 18 holes in Japan."

Yet, although there are tremendous opportunities to design, build, and sell products and services in this region, there are pitfalls.

Golf course architects, fertilizers and chemical suppliers, irrigation designers, equipment and product suppliers must address "how their products and services fit into new cultures and climates," Noble said. "Nowhere in the United States, for instance, are there monsoons or regular three-inch per hour rainstorms; and few places have volcanic soils."

LOCAL EPAS

Noble said new government environmental agencies are starting to affect development. The new Environmental Protection Agency in Taiwan recently announced it was going to begin monitoring golf course maintenance practices in the drinking watershed areas, and if they were found to be contributing substantially to pollution, they would be closed.

This agency also recommended that no new courses should be developed in the watershed areas, a decision that "is having a big impact as there are developers planning courses in those areas," Noble said.

Concern over ground water has the Guam EPA "leaning toward required ground- and surface-water monitoring for new courses that is estimated to cost nearly $1 million per course per year," he said. "This cost, if enforced, is more than enough to stop development of several new courses."

As a result of that Guam action, a group of planners and developers have asked Noble to help them devise plans...
Wetlands areas no issue where monsoon season strikes

By Mark Leslie

BANGKOK, Thailand — Wetlands may be an environmental obstacle for golf course development in the United States, but not so in Thailand, according to architect Gary Roger Baird of Memphis, Tennessee, USA.

Baird says Thailand is concerned, rather, with developers "randomly cutting into its hardwood forests."

While confrontations take place over the valued forests, wetlands abound in the monsoon region and a golf course only enhances the value of the land.

Baird was involved in a major case in point — the $100-million Royal Gems Golf and Sports Complex in western Bangkok. Built on a site that was once mostly under water, Royal Gems officially opened last Dec. 21 and has already hosted the Asian Women’s Championship and is being hailed as perhaps the best course in Bangkok.

Baird said the site is 1-1/2 miles long and about 500 yards wide. The first phase of preparation was to build a levee three meters (10 feet) tall around the entire project. That protected the property from flooding when the monsoons hit.

The property was drained of water by 8,000-gallon-per-minute pumps placed at each corner of the site. Four to five months of preparation took place as wide-track tractors peeled off the earth a little at a time to dry it out and allow rough earthwork to be done.

The 200-acre golf course was then built so all fairways would drain into the 40 acres of lakes within the course.

Baird says the special preparation and work paid off. The course is under consideration for World Cup play. And the rest of the development is special to behold. Waterfalls are everywhere, he said, and plans call for 260 homesites, four towers of condominiums, a 100-room hotel, 110-square-foot clubhouse, two restaurants, an observatory tower, conference center with library, and a ballroom that seats 350.

For athletes, the project boasts a 100-meter pool, jogging track, acrobatics center, tennis courts, pool, billiards, and much more, including 24-hour medical aid.