Much of golf industry untouched by recession
By Charles von Brecht

Depending on where and when you read this, you’re most likely going to or coming from the GCSSA show. For those of you not attending this year’s event in New Orleans, I can safely say that you’re missing quite an extravaganza.

As we go to press, the latest GCSSA report says more than 16,000 participants are expected. It also states that 95 percent of available exhibit space is rented; 550 supplier companies are going to participate; and there are 80 first-time exhibitors.

This doesn’t sound like a recession, does it?

A quick exhibitor count from 1989 (our first time at the show) of about 400. That’s a 37.5-percent increase in three years!

I will be interested to talk to the new exhibitors to see what they are peddling and why they have come to the show. My guess is, they have products or services marketed to other industries that are not faring so well and looking to our industry as a new market.

Is the golf course industry entering the recession as well as it seems to be? I think it is... and here’s why.

1. Golf courses are still being built and new courses are opening. I suggested a few months ago that we’d see an average of 150 to 200 new courses opened per year in this decade. I was wrong.

The National Golf Foundation says 351 new courses and additions opened in 1991, and 250 to 300 are expected to open in 1992. In fact, an estimated 531 are under construction.

2. The RTC has taken over some courses that were not doing well and selling those properties (often at bargain prices) to qualified owners and management groups who know how to make the operations profitable.

3. The recession has definitely hurt many of this country’s big corporations, which, in turn, has led to people losing their jobs. General Motors, for example, says it’s going to lay off 75,000 employees over the next few years.

This is staggering! But from what I read, none of these 75,000 will enter unemployment with only their golf club. According to the latest data from NGF, another 583 courses are under construction.

They’re going to spend more time in leisure activities... like golf! New retirees will most likely head for the public courses where they can play for reasonable rates.

But what’s happening at the private facilities around the country? No doubt the new real estate-related private clubs are hurting. (See related story on page 31.)

Many have closed down totally until new buyers are found. What about old-line clubs in large cities? Friends in St. Louis tell me the waiting period at a few of the clubs is not as long, but you’re still going to wait at Old Warson and Bellever.

And I’ll bet there aren’t many members leaving Augusta National, Pine Valley or Cypress Point.

The golf course industry seems to be holding up very well during this recession, and I feel for those in the automobile and other industries who are facing unemployment. For those of us in this industry, we should continue our strong and positive posture and pray we never endure the plight that has affected other industries.

So there it is. As we go to press, the latest GCSSA report says more than 16,000 participants are expected. It also states that 95 percent of available exhibit space is rented; 550 supplier companies are going to participate; and there are 80 first-time exhibitors.

This doesn’t sound like a recession, does it? Much of golf industry untouched by recession
Add sulfur if you want a truly 'complete' fertilizer

To the editor:

As a turfgrass specialist for 15 years, I have been interested in the nutritional needs of turfgrass in order to maintain optimal health and minimize the negative impacts of a wide array of stressful situations. The terms macronutrients, micro-nutrients, and trace elements are all relative terms that have the capacity to inaccurately place values on certain nutrients as they relate to proper plant nutrition. The most important nutrient(s) to any plant must be that one or more which is found to be limiting.

The current definition of macronutrients (aside from C-H-O) consists of the major nutrients N-P-K and represents those elements historically accepted as required for a "complete" fertilizer.

I suggest that in the specific case of turfgrass nutrition four, not three, primary nutrients are critical to the healthy completion of the healthy turfgrass in amounts greater than the naysayers, and accomplished more than perhaps even the optimists had dreamed.

Sulfur is usually found in tissue analyses of healthy turfgrass in amounts greater than that of phosphorus. Sulfur in the plant-available sulfate form is also generally much more lacking in most soils than are the other two "secondary nutrients" — calcium and magnesium.

The nutritional value of sulfur for turfgrasses has been overshadowed for far too long by sulfur's use as a soil amendment to modify soil pH. Yet sulfur is responsible for a great number of plant processes of particular importance to turfgrasses versus other crops.

New courses and additions

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<td>351</td>
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Sulfur is a major factor in turf's ability to provide for improved drought tolerance, winter hardiness, color and density. This is in addition to its important role in many metabolic functions that are commonly accepted as beneficial for other plant groups.

Turfgrass management, and so turfgrass fertilizers, have evolved as an off-shoot from strictly agricultural models, and maybe it's time we turfgrass managers recognize and treat turfgrass as the unique "crop" it is.

I believe fertilizers manufactured for and intended to be applied to turfgrass should be described in terms of their nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium and sulfur content. The N-P-K-S designation for a "complete" turf-type fertilizer will be of far more value to serious turfgrass nutritionists. Consumers also should have every right to expect the "complete" fertilizer they are buying for their lawn is just that — complete with the four basic nutrients most important and most often found lacking for optimum turfgrass health and nutrition.

Sincerely,

Dan Nason
Great Salt Lake Minerals Corp.
Overland Park, Kan.

No consistent effort made to pull together research

To the editor:

As a member of a family that has been in the golf business since the 1920s and as an avid golfer with a degree in environmental studies, I am concerned about environmental issues and the golf industry.

The nutritional value of sulfur for turfgrasses has been overshadowed for far too long by sulfur's use as a soil amendment to modify soil pH. Yet sulfur is responsible for a great number of plant processes of particular importance to turfgrasses versus other crops.

After conversations with a number of industry members, it has become apparent that no consistent effort is being made to coordinate or promote environmental efforts industry-wide. There is already a tremendous wealth of research available offering studies on pesticides, fertilizers, water use, etc.

Unfortunately, the golfing public (and, as importantly, the non-golfing public) are at the mercy of groups who distort/dilute scientific findings to serve their purposes (both pro and con golf).

We need a coordinated effort to share information among industry professionals, continued research in the field and in the lab, education of legislators and regulators as to the benefits of environmentally responsible golf courses, and a good public education/relations campaign that shares vital information about golf's important role in communities.

Other industries have taken a pro-active stance in addressing environmental issues. The paper, food, plastic, drug, oil and gas, clothing, and chemical industries have all recognized that environmentally savvy consumers are here to stay.

Golf is no different. Even more than some of the above-mentioned industries, golf courses are a "lightning rod" for people with environmental concerns. (Incidentally, in a recent national poll, 78 percent of Americans considered themselves "environmentalists.")

We need to provide consistent information, education and marketing efforts to golf industry professionals and the American public to promote golf courses as the good neighbors they can be.

Make no mistake about it, golf as an industry is as vulnerable to public opinion as any other in this country. Policymakers, legislators and regulators react to a vocal public. If that public remains uninformed and vulnerable to misinterpretation of facts surrounding the golf industry, the results may include loss of development permits, an increase in fines, exorbitant water-use fees, decline in the golfing public, etc.

The time is right for pro-active and creative programming that serves the needs of the golf industry and provides the American public with a fair representation of golf courses as exemplary community neighbors.

Sincerely,

David L. Bennell
Portland, Maine