Soil blending a fitting expense in high-tech construction

By HAL PHILLIPS

With golf course construction costs climbing well into the millions of dollars, it's interesting that soil blending remains something of a luxury process. Yet as the golf industry becomes more and more sophisticated — and green construction becomes more and more expensive — soil blending may become a necessity.

The advantages are clear: complete uniformity and high quality. Considering it may cost $300,000 to build 18 greens, shelling out $20,000 on proper soil-blending procedures is the proverbial "drop in the bucket."

Yet when it comes to deciding whether to retain soil-blending services, what takes precedence — cost or quality? Architects make the recommendations, but is that decision based purely on budgetary considerations? "One thing we don't skimp on is that mix," said Tom Clark, partner in the firm of Ault, Clark & Associates, Ltd. "The owners realize they need to get the proper greens mix, so they don't have to go back and rebuild them. It's happened. There were times when layering and all kinds of problems have cropped up. Now that's expensive."

Architect Dick Nugent, another soil blending enthusiast, likes the fact that blenders aren't "too picky about the kind of sand they use." Nugent points out that, while architects often decide whether to go the blending route, builders and contractors must deal directly with soil blending.

"From an architect's standpoint, the product is excellent," he explained. "But from a contractor's standpoint, it may be more expensive and it may mean a loss of control. "The contractor also has to worry about practical things. Does he have a suitable place to mix the stuff by himself? Where's he supposed to do it? In the parking lot? "You don't have to worry about that with blenders."

Dr. Michael Hurdzan, principal of Hurdzan Design Group, can't say enough about the technology, which makes for superior blends.
Tee To Green builder blessed using his own soil blender

About five months ago, Steve Hutchison of Tee To Green Golf Course Construction took the plunge and purchased a Model 2200 soil blender from Dakota Peat. His life is simpler, he says, and his product is better.

“It’s been great,” Hutchison reports. “We really like the control we get with the blender, and we know we’re not going to have any trouble with these greens down the road.”

Hutchison, whose company is currently working on three courses, said the elimination of contracted soil-blending services has already brought increased simplicity and savings.

Yet his recent purchase has also resulted in peace of mind.

“The part I don’t like about contracting out is I don’t feel comfortable turning over something so important to a subcontractor,” he says. “The assurance of quality is very important. The blender is just one more tool that assures me of the quality I must have to be competitive.”

The addition of in-house soil-blending capability has created additional business opportunities for Tee To Green in the sport turf industry.

“The blender has really opened some doors,” he says. “If I can blend it and quality control it to exact specification, I have a leg up.”

So, Hutchison is a satisfied customer.

“Very much so.”