Major strides expected in turf industry by year 2000

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— Dr. James Watson

By MARK LESLIE
COLUMBUS, Ohio — Green industry researchers are on the verge of major advances in biocontrol agents, bioengineered grasses and compost, while "many of the same concerns we have today will still be with us in the year 2000," according to Dr. James Watson. Speaking at the Ohio Turfgrass Conference and Show here Dec. 7, Watson said: "Many of the good things that are going to happen...will not happen until after the Year 2000. I think we will have some solutions to some of our concerns, and I anticipate we will have new products that will mitigate some of the more serious concerns of today."

Composts and other organic-based materials — what Watson calls biocontrol agents — will be key players in the future fight against turfgrass diseases, especially in an era when chemical use is seen declining. Composts and other organic-based materials — what Watson calls biocontrol agents — will be key players in the future fight against turfgrass diseases, especially in an era when chemical use is seen declining. "For example," he said, "antagonistic organisms have been isolated from compost and field areas that attack or at least mitigate the virulence of pathogens that cause dollar spot, brown patch and other organisms. Organisms have also been found that are antagonistic to root diseases." Besides biocontrol agents, he also cites beneficial nematodes, parasitic wasps, and bacteria that attack insects as showing "considerable promise."

The problem of creating an environment that will ensure adequate supplies of these biocountrols and favorable organisms has not been solved. "But it will certainly be," Watson predicted.

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Watson: Green industry failures evoke need to change

COLUMBUS, Ohio—Dr. James Watson, president of the International Turfgrass Society and former vice president of The Toro Co., admonished colleagues in the green industry in his talk at the Ohio Turfgrass Conference and Show for not informing the public about the benefits and shortcomings of turfgrass.

"Be assured, the green industry will be severely taxed and challenged the remainder of this century and beyond," Watson said. "Researchers, professionals, practitioners, extension personnel, consultants and all others who purvey information will be challenged in the political, ethical, environmental, safety and standards arenas.

"Why? Because of something I think is wrong with our industry. Too often we fall in construction techniques. Too often we don't get the right kinds of seedbed materials. We use wrong grasses. Perhaps our management procedures and techniques are not always the best. But are these the areas that are wrong, or is it simply the manner in which we use or are told to use various factors? "I happen to think it may be our publicity campaigns are not the best."

He added: "Why, for example, are the experts in the green industry not recognized, not perceived as authorities and often overridden in decisions that can make or break turfgrasses consulting? Why are the knowledgeable experts not called before problems arise on new or renovated sports fields? Why, when the turfgrass industry has new and improved grasses, procedures for specifying soil texture and techniques in construction and establishment, are managers still blinded when grass is lost?"

With new maintenance equipment, supplies and materials, and more knowledge about cultural practices, grass should not die, Watson said.

"One major factor may be the economics — not the economics associated with turf management but with facility management. Most managers and investors have to generate a return on their investment. But whether or not excues are valid, "they adversely reflect on the green industry, often because the industry has not done a good job of explaining that there are limitations to turfgrass areas. We talk only to ourselves, not to the public," he said.

Changes by 2000

Continued from previous page

Among Watson's predictions for the industry are:

• Increased use of native grasses like buffalo grass.

• Superior salt grasses that will tolerate 7,000 to 8,000 parts per million of salt. "That will permit us to use brackish water supplies. These grasses have substantial promise, especially in the West and Southwest."

• A proliferation of organic-based fertilizers.

• New laws, "ostensibly to protect the environment. And you must be aware of them and take steps to make certain you are not prohibited from using water that might even be on your golf courses."

Some of these regulations may be detrimental. Methyl bromide is being considered to be taken off the market. Yet 90 percent of methyl bromide that goes into the atmosphere comes from the ocean. Man's contribution is minute, like a grain of sand on the beach. Yet, they may take it away from those who need it.

Urging the industry to be active and outspoken, Watson said: "Green industry facilities are an integral part of our present and future lifestyle and needs. We must not let this future be decided by political entities, environmental extremists, or anyone not familiar with the green industry. They must not dictate our future."

Sweda takes office

Continued from page 25 by the year 2000.

Citing the many professors retiring from other universities, he said, "Ohio State has a golden opportunity to become the leader in turfgrass research."

"Research is our key number-one priority," he said. "We're funding the new biotechnology center at OSU. They're going to genetically alter a plant and try to develop a drought-tolerant plant—Maybe in the near future we'll have our Buckeye grass.

Sweda, who left Beechmont Country Club in Cleveland to join Columbia Hills CC last spring, said he views his service as president as returning "what somebody gave me 26 years ago. Somebody gave me a wealth of knowledge and got me started. I want to give it back."

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