

Seed companies victimized by the double squeeze



Hal Phillips,
editor

Pity the seed companies doing business in Oregon's grass belt. They're getting squeezed and superintendents may well see higher ryegrass prices as a result.

For the better part of two years, we've been reporting on the advent of purchasing groups — courses which have pooled their buying power to negotiate lower prices on products, like grass seed. These groups buy in bulk, so while sales are steady and voluminous, seed company margins take a hit on the top end.

Now many perennial ryegrass growers — the farmers who sell their product to seed companies — have organized a bargaining association and instituted floor prices (see story on page 1). For seed companies, this hurts margins on the bottom end.

It's called feeling the pinch of tighter margins at both ends of the marketplace.

"The price is going up. No doubt about that. People in the golf course market should know that," explained Mike Robinson, Seed Research of Oregon president. "And it's not only because of the bargaining association — it's because of supply and demand."

"There has been a shortage around the world of perennial ryegrass, and seed companies have been getting a little more money this year. But we may be facing a huge crop this year. If we have a bumper crop and prices don't go down, we won't see a price hike until next spring."

Bob Richardson, president and general manager of Great Western Seed, said the increase will come this fall. He also believes the Perennial Ryegrass Bargaining Association may well signal a new era in seed economics. "Initially we're going to see it in ryegrass," he said. "But if these guys are successful — and they are very well positioned to be successful — I can foresee a fescue bargaining association popping up in the near future."

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Through the wonder of the Turfgrass Information Network (TGIF) and Turfbyte, *Golf Course News* has been on-line for sometime. But we finally have our own e-mail address:

hphillip@gcn.biddeford.com.

For you superintendents, managers, architects and builders with one foot firmly planted in the 21st century, anyone at *Golf Course News* — Charles von Brecht, Mark Leslie, Bob Sanner,

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Some bureaucrats can't see the issues for the red tape

A friend of ours owns a farm in rural Maine. One day she walked out into her yard to find a coyote standing in the driveway eyeing her dog, who was hitched. The coyote had just killed a sheep, was drooling blood, and may have had rabies since he was already eyeing his next kill and he was out in the open in daylight. A lady jogger running by saw the coyote, crossed to the other side of the street and hollered over, "Patty, don't you know about our leash laws?"

Consumed by an **apparent** violation of a minor law, that woman entirely missed a real danger.

Do you ever wonder if the same thing is going through the minds of certain bureaucrats?

Do you sometimes wonder if they are talking without thinking and regulating with no common sense whatever?

It was, after all, EPA Administrator Carol Browner who described her job as "... protecting the health of the people of this country and the health of the resources we all share — the air and the land and the water." She was doing fine until she added, "But I can't do my job if the people of this country don't have health care." Say, what?

This all comes to mind because of the case of *Pennington Enterprises, Inc. versus the United States of America* (see page 61). Pennington was absolutely and foolishly wronged by a bureaucrat — supported by other bureaucrats — costing the seed company \$250,000 and a half dozen other companies another \$750,000. Sonny Pennington was the only one to take on the government, fully knowing the long road ahead. And he was indeed prophetic on June 9, 1989, when he said, "The government's got thousands of attorneys on salary who can drag the thing out forever," and added, "I can sue and possibly win \$250,000 and it will cost me \$200,000."

Indeed, some 2,200 days later, the U.S. Treasury has paid Pennington \$250,000 for his losses, plus interest. There was no compensation for the \$170,000 in lawyers' fees that



Mark Leslie,
managing editor

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OBITUARY

Dr. William H. Daniel, 75

WEST LAFAYETTE, Ind. — Dr. William H. Daniel, Purdue University professor emeritus, died Feb. 24 in St. Elizabeth Hospital medical center, where he had been a patient one day.

Dr. Daniel, 75, retired in 1985 after working 35 years at the Department of Agronomy. One of the leaders in developing the International Turfgrass Society, he pioneered research and educational methods in turfgrass management and developed the PURR-Wick Water Management System and Prescription Athletic Turf (PAT).

He is survived by his widow, Gwen, a son and two daughters.

Memorial funds may be sent to the Daniel Scholarship Fund, Department of Agronomy, Purdue University, or the Endowment Fund of the Federated Church here.

Letters

PBI/GORDON SETS THE RECORD STRAIGHT

To the editor:

PBI/Gordon Corp. wishes to correct any misconception concerning the quality of SCAG mowers that may have been generated by our 1995 Embark Lite advertising campaign, "Get the turf management tool that works when you can't!"

The campaign is based on the testimonial of Scott Hall, president of Classic Landscape, Inc. of Frederick, Md. According to Mr. Hall, Classic Landscape uses Embark Lite as a "tool" in his business, i.e. the plant-growth regulator (PGR) keeps turf growth from getting out of hand when schedule delays might otherwise be experienced.

The makers of SCAG mowers felt that the mention of inevitable "mower breakdowns" in an ad which pictures one of their machines might cause the industry to perceive the mower in a negative way.

In fact, Scott Hall has used SCAG mowers for several years and is proud of all the tools he has selected for use in his business. A sprayer, a string trimmer, a blower, a PC unit and a jug of Embark Lite, all the property of Classic Landscape, are

also displayed in the ad.

We hope no one thinks that we intended to imply that any of these items are of inferior quality. After all, Embark Lite is a quality tool, so it was our intention to feature the product among other quality turf management tools.

I would also like to state that the ad is not intended to imply endorsement of Embark Lite by any of the equipment manufacturers whose products are pictured. We understand that many manufacturers feel that PGRs are in competition with them. It's really too bad, because PGRs can't replace mowing and trimming, but they can save wear and tear on equipment and help contractors and managers with scheduling.

Hal Dickey
Director of Advertising
PBI/Gordon Corp.
Kansas City, Mo.

TDD TAKES ISSUE WITH 'TRUCE'

To the editor:

I saw the "Truce" in bold print on the front page of the April edition of *GCN* in regard to the relationship between the USGA and the current physical evaluation laboratories supporting the 1993 USGA Guidelines. I was

confused, because in order to have a truce, you first have to have a "War" and at best Mr. [Jim] Snow's fear was only the need to deal with the potential of angry lab technicians. But I am sure that the mob of Green Section personnel that was in attendance would have gallantly protected Mr. Snow. However, I can't fault *GCN* for the tone-setting header of the article because, as Mr. Stossel was quoted in Mark Leslie's column in April's edition, it sells newspapers.

The meeting that the USGA set up in San Francisco with the American Association of Laboratory Accreditation was in no small way historic. The USGA deserves credit for taking a major step forward in resolving the controversy over the qualifications of the laboratories that protect the integrity of the 1993 USGA Guidelines.

It was clear to me that there was no opposition to the requirement for accreditation of the laboratories and there will probably be a list of accredited labs by the 1997 GCSAA show. However, please let me clarify the somewhat less than optimistic picture of the accreditation process that was attributed to me.

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Discovering nature's bounty, and environmental promise, in golf

By MARTIN BYHOWER

To many committed environmentalists, golf courses are, by conventional wisdom, anathema. Perceived as destroyers of valuable natural habitats, guzzlers of precious, diminishing water supplies, and sloppy repositories for pesticides, herbicides, and chemical fertilizers for the sole purpose of maintaining a sterile monoculture of grass, they are the last place most of us would expect to harbor wildlife! Yet some ardent birders have recognized, at least empirically, that certain golf courses can be good places to spot unusual species.

If you think about it, it makes sense. Birds and humans generally like the same kinds of places, and this is no coincidence. Behavioral scientists identify the "ideal human environment," that is, one to which we would naturally gravitate to live (and, presumably, play) as consisting of grassy (savanna) areas with interspersed trees, overlooking natural water sources.

Whether this harkens back to ancestral hominids descending from trees in an African savanna is the topic of a different essay! Birds like trees and water, too, and for many types, an open grassland bordering a grove of their preferred tree species provides the appropriate mixture

The above comment appeared in Hummin', the newsletter for Palos Verdes/South Bay (Calif.) Audubon, a chapter of the National Audubon Society.

of foraging and nesting habitats.

Unfortunately, many important wild habitats, and their inextricably linked native species, have been lost due to the development that often accompanies golf course construction (and, on occasion, golf courses have been the precursors or lures used to sell such developments). Management practices that utilize large amounts of fertilizers or toxic chemical additives, particularly those that are non-degradable (many of which are now, however, being phased out) have been demonstrated to be harmful to wildlife species that try to survive on or adjacent to golf greens. And building water-guzzling golf courses in arid desert environments like Palm Springs, is, in my mind, rather difficult to justify on any grounds.

Golf courses are a fact of life, however, providing recreation for many of the human species. Although the birding habit consumes most of my own leisure (not to mention side-vocational) time, I have friends who balance their addiction between birds and birdies. A remarkable visit on Aug. 12, 1994, to the Virginia Country Club in Long Beach, however, opened my mind to the possibility that golf courses and nature can coexist; for me, this was a startling but very welcome revelation, for it suggests the possibility of two seemingly disparate groups of recreation-seekers becoming allies in ways that enhance the quality of life for both (not to mention aiding in the survival of other critters!).

I would imagine that most golfers

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Increase of jobs tied to upgrades at daily-fee, municipal courses

By GEORGE HAMILTON

A question that is often asked of turfgrass science educators is "Are you producing more graduates than there are job opportunities?" This is a legitimate question. After all, our mission should not be to produce a sheer number of graduates to support our reason for existence, but to continue to fill a void and meet the demands of our industry. Of course, one demand may be to have the opportunity to select from several qualified applicants for each position open.

The job market for turf graduates this year in the Northeast has been the best I have seen in the past few years. I believe a couple of things are responsible for this.

First, there seems to be an increase in the number of jobs available at single-owner and municipal golf courses with low budgets. Obviously, the low-budget operations typically don't have the money to support a full-

time, well-trained superintendent. An increase in job opportunities in this segment may be the result of the demand for better playing conditions from players. I think the more likely reason is the fact that the superintendent position has become much more complex. This is especially true when considering the environmental issues,

pesticide usage and regulation, and worker protection.

Of course, if these positions are going to be attractive to people with the appropriate qualifications, the salaries and benefits will have to match those qualifications. When hiring people for important positions, the adage "You get what you pay for" definitely holds true.

The second, and largest area of demand for turf graduates continues to be assistant and second assistant superintendent positions. This year and in the past we have had many more job openings than graduates to fill them. As of early April, we had received job announcements for 57 assistant and second assistant positions since November. Dr. Trey Rogers of Michigan State experienced the same

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George Hamilton

George Hamilton is a member of the faculty in Penn State University's Turfgrass Management Program.

Letters

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There was some confusion about my remarks on the floor of the show in San Francisco to Mark Leslie, and that is very understandable.

There was some discussion of the need for standardized equipment for testing. Many people are not aware that much of the equipment is manufactured by the labs. Sometimes it is hard for associations like the USGA to understand the competitive nature of the commercial industry. As an example, Turf Diagnostics & Design has spent close to \$500,000 in capital funds and development time to produce equipment and test procedures that have set the standard for the industry. This is borne out by the presence of a considerable amount of our development work in the 1993 USGA Guidelines. I could never justify to my investors turning over five years of work to my competitors as part of the accreditation process. In my conversation with Mark Leslie, my five-year scenario included an attempt to standardize the equipment. However, multiple labs have contacted me about this issue and are strongly opposed to any attempt to standardize the equipment.

Imagine if you will: The head of R&D for Toro calling Rainbird's head of R&D and asking him to fax over their latest information on head design because they were

having problems with one of their new heads. The same scenario could apply to Flowtronex/PSI or Watertronics, Scotts and Lesco. Not likely to happen in my lifetime.

Perhaps this analogy will help people better understand this lab issue and the 1993 Guidelines. Let's relate the USGA 1993 Guidelines to a Burberry suit. If you are a 44 reg., but they sell you a 46 long, well, that's still an excellent suit from Burberry's, but not for you. The USGA 1993 Guidelines are akin to a rack of Burberry suits; the key is getting the right fit. If you want to assume that all the labs are producing the same numbers, please understand that just puts you in the clothes store, you will need the right fit. To extend the analogy a little further, it also pays to have a fine tailor when the environment is at stake.

A closing comment to Charlie von Brecht. In my opinion, the GCN Letter to the Editor forum is one of the most important reasons for the overall improvement of the golf development industry.

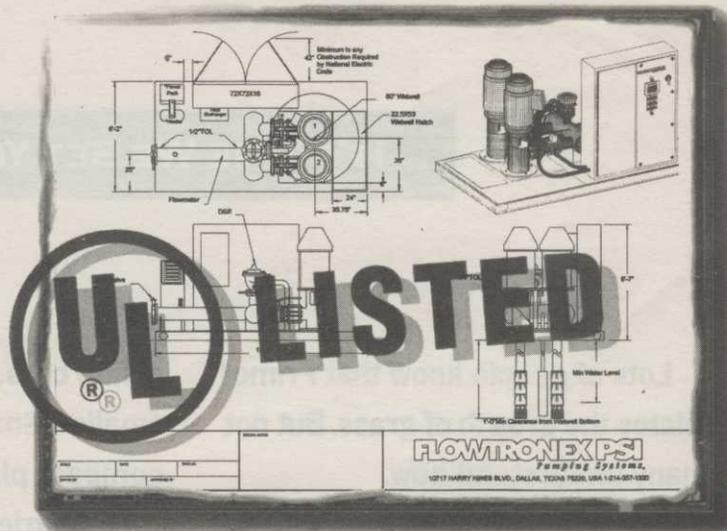
Stephen McWilliams
president/CEO
Turf Diagnostics & Design
Olathe, Kan.

Ed. Point taken on the media's need to "sell newspapers." Fortunately for GCN and its readers, our newspaper is free to all qualified readers, like Mr. McWilliams.

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