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Richard McNabb (right) is the latest to earn the prestigious Master Greenkeeper status. For story, see page 15.

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Trained irrigation techs, mechanics in demand
By PETER BLAIS
Shovel jockey, wrench turner.
Not particularly flattering titles for the people who fill the roles of irrigation technician and turf equipment manager. But if educators, course managers and others have their way, shovel jockey and wrench turner could go the way of greenkeeper in the near future.

The Public Arena
Is development in state parks the next public-access frontier, or is it one step too far?

RTC's Kiawah auction scheduled for May 19
By PETER BLAIS
CHARLESTON, S.C. — The prestigious Ocean Course at Kiawah Island is scheduled to go back on the auction block May 19. A dozen parties interested in becoming the new owners of the Pete Dye-designed layout and site of the 1991 Ryder Cup attended a bidder's conference here in early April. Among the potential bidders were course owners, management companies, local golf industry veterans and individuals with no ties to the golf business.

Supers turn OSHA regs to their budgetary advantage
By MARK LESLIE
While state and federal legislators struggle with weighing the costs and benefits before passing new laws, golf course superintendents may actually save their clubs money following suggestions from safety experts like Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) personnel.

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Oregon ryegrass growers organize bargaining group
By HAL PHILLIPS
ALBANY, Ore. — Here in the Willamette Valley, the microeconomics of low carry-over inventory and a 1995 bumper crop have taken a back seat to the macroeconomics of floor prices, overproduction and their affects on the old standby, supply and demand. The result will likely be higher ryegrass prices this fall — maybe as much as 10 cents per pound, according to industry experts.

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Seed growers organize bargaining association

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dealers see the PRBA initiative as tampering with the principles of supply and demand. Besides, they argue, a few good crops and dealers will be paying 45 cents per pound for seed worth 43 cents or less.

"The growers are producing too much perennial ryegrass—that's the problem here," said Mike Robinson, president of Corvallis-based Seed Research of Oregon. "As a group, what they should be doing is controlling the acreage of production. Take 10 percent and devote it to something else. That will help the price of ryegrass in the long term. Instead — and we see this all the time — if the price of annual ryegrass goes up one year, they all plant annual ryegrass. Then the price goes down."

Bob Richardson, vice president and general manager of Great Western Seed, a wholly owned subsidiary of Lofts, Inc., agreed that oversupply plays a role, but he noted that bans on field burning and controlling the acreage of production. Take 10 percent and devote it to something else. That will help the price of ryegrass in the long term. Instead — and we see this all the time — if the price of annual ryegrass goes up one year, they all plant annual ryegrass. Then the price goes down.

"I telling you what my costs are going to be, [a floor price] makes my job easier. And if I know what everyone else's costs are going to be, it creates a level playing field. I can put on my margin and away we go."

With the new, higher floor price now in place and ryegrass predicted to be scarce this fall, will seed companies simply pass the price increases on to their buyers, i.e., superintendents?

"Absolutely," said Carnes, "Seed companies can get their margins up. And there isn't one of them who doesn't want to increase their margins... Golf courses have to be green. The main cost of keeping it green is fertilizers and chemicals, not seed."

Richardson agrees: "The ultimate result is, superintendents will have to start budgeting more money for seed. I bet golf courses are looking at 10 cents extra per pound. And it should kick in this July, August or September."

Robinson disagrees: "If we raise prices, the superintendent will simply use less seed. He's got a budget. I've seen this before. The superintendent will cut back on his usage."

Seed companies are taking price hits on both ends of the market, said Richardson. While the growers are taking margin away at one end, golf course buying groups — like those organized by larger management companies and the National Golf Course Owners Association — have negotiated lower seed prices at the other end of the spectrum.

"They're getting squeezed," said Richardson, "and they have to pass the costs along."

Further, the PRBA didn't materialize out of thin air, said Underwood: "I think the dealers may have brought this situation on themselves by trying to sell cheaper than each other," he said. "And instead of taking those costs out of their own margins, they tried to take it from the grower."

Robinson said he wishes the Perennial Ryegrass Bargaining Association would pay more attention to the third word in its title: "They call it a bargaining association, but they just tell us what they want," he said. "If the seed companies did that as a group, they'd call it anti-trust... A lot of seed companies are looking for other areas to grow grass seed. They're looking at New Zealand and Canada."

Foreign growing markets are an option, but it's unclear whether the cost of freight would scuttle attempts to save on the production end. The situation is slightly more promising for dealers in Canada where the dollar has fallen along with America's. However, if Canadian currency rebounds, seed companies will find themselves right back where they started — struggling with shrinking margins.

Other bargaining associations have come and gone in the Willamette Valley, but never has one held together this long or effectively. And none has been so well positioned.

"Their timing has been perfect," said Richardson. "We've had excellent fall demand. We've had excellent spring demand. The fall will be very busy.

"Companies have a choice of whether to cooperate with the bargaining association. Most of these growers grow for two or three companies at a minimum... If company A says it will go along, their stuff will get cleaned first. If company B says no, they'll probably have to wait their turn."

Lynn Grooms is editor of Seed World magazine. The above story was reprinted with her permission.

GOLF COURSE NEWS

Packaging prices

Continued from page 61

predicted continued higher prices for the rest of 1995 and into 1996.

Several pulp producers have announced an additional price increase of $1.00 per ton effective June 1.

As pulp prices continue to rise, they will have a direct effect on prices for some products such as the bleached white paper sheets used as the outside printed ply in many seed bags for brand identification and high quality color graphic design. As March 8, seed companies could expect to pay between 40 cents and 50 cents per bag, depending on such factors as quantities, bag size and construction.

At a recent meeting of the Independent Professional Seedsmen's Association, Paul McDonald of Repap Manitoba reported that while European and North American manufacturers of coated paper are an extremely independent bunch, Consequently, assessments of the PRBA tend to vary.

"We have to see how flexible the growers can be in low markets," said Rich Underwood, president of International Seed. "If we decide we need to decrease summation and there aren't enough growing, we can't control production. We have high and low markets in agriculture, and we'll see how they handle it."

"From a marketing standpoint, if I know what my costs are going to be, [a floor price] makes my job easier. And if I know what everyone else's costs are going to be, it creates a level playing field. I can put on my margin and away we go."

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