Junk food for turfgrass? McCue serves up a batch

By Mark Leslie

CASTLE ROCK, Colo. — The chef at the Country Club at Castle Pines may think superintendent Sean McCue is baking a batch of cookies with all the molasses he's buying but, in fact, he’s heating up a meal that is producing healthy turfgrass and saving money.

For the past year McCue has been spraying his greens and fairways with a concoction of molasses and cane sugar, along with iron and a help product. "It’s our own roots mix, if you will," McCue said. "It’s a quick carbohydrate source — basically a junk food for grass. It heats it up and gives it a quick flush."

The effect is very noticeable and almost immediate. "You notice it on greens in particular," McCue said. "The day before you spray, you might get a third of a basket of grass clippings. The next morning, after you spray, you get a full basket."

Besides the quick flush, the application improves grass color and increases its rooting mass, he said.

"We use this mixture to help break the greens out of dormancy without using N [nitrogen]," McCue said. "We use TGR, a plant growth regulator, for poa annua control in the fall. With TGR, you get a straw-colored discoloration in the spring."

"It’s a substitute for a roots product. You try to generate some growth without adding nitrogen."

In 1996 McCue applied the molasses mixture every two weeks from April through late-September on this course which pushes through 25,000 rounds in a seven-month season.

His crew generally adds nitrogen in a separate application. Sticking to a philosophy of keeping things lean, last year McCue applied 1.7 pounds of nitrogen the entire growing season.

"On the greens we put down .38 pounds of N last April 18," McCue said. "By supplementing with all these other sources of food, we were able to go without fertilizing again until July 29."

He said his molasses mixture costs about one-half the price of over-the-counter roots products.

Where does McCue buy such large amounts of molasses and sugar cane?

"Our chef orders it for me," he said. "I buy it by the gallon — 20 gallons at a time. He thinks I’m making cookies down here."

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Mole cricket challenge continues

By Rick Brandenburg

Although managing mole crickets on golf courses is a chore reserved primarily for superintendents in the Southeast, this pest has spread northward, with an occasional report in Virginia and moved west into Texas. Many of the lessons learned while trying to manage this pest in the South have implications that can improve control of other pests such as white grubs anywhere in the United States.

Like white grubs, mole crickets are soil insects. They feed primarily on turfgrass roots and can be quite damaging. The fact that they are soil insects challenges us in two ways. First, it is difficult to get a good picture of exactly what the insect is doing below the soil surface. This keeps us guessing as to

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Research sheds light on control

Under certain conditions, higher rates of some products will actually perform poorly as compared to lower rates. Poor control is often associated with the behavior of the mole cricket and its ability to avoid pesticides. Performance of the pesticide in the soil environment changes. To address these challenges, researchers are testing pesticide application equipment calibration, directing control efforts against the small crickets, and avoiding treatment under extreme weather conditions help avoid these failures. Irrigation also influences control and this area is still under study because the response to irrigation is somewhat dependent

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COMMENTARY

A look at turf: '60 to the future

By Michael Hurdzan

Golf was just starting to boom around 1960, and turfgrass management was becoming a recognized curriculum at the Ohio State University. When I entered that program in 1961, there was one real turfgrass specialist — Dr. Bob Miller — but most of what other professors taught was based on pasture agriculture.

Life was pretty simple, with only a few turfgrasses (Merion, Windsor and Penncross were the high-tech cultivars). Automatic tee and green irrigation was in its infancy with electro-mechanical clocks, and fairways were watered using quick couplers. And the testing for sand-soil-peat for root zones was to mix some up in a bucket, look at it and run your

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PLANTS FOR LIFE