

SRO HONORS COURSE AND SUPER OF THE YEAR

Seed Research of Oregon, Inc. awarded Eagle Point Golf Course located here its 1996 "Golf Course of the Year" award. For their hard work and dedication, architect Robert Trent Jones II, and golf course superintendent, Dave Stephens received their awards at this year's Golf

Course Superintendents Association of America's International Golf Course Conference and Show in Las Vegas.

Seed Research also presented Paul Ellwood, CGCS, formerly of Club Terravita in Scottsdale, Ariz., its 1996 "Golf Course Superintendent of the Year" award in Vegas.

Field burning

Continued from page 53

management of Kentucky bluegrass" is at the heart of the Washington ban, Chastain said. OSU's recommendations are in five parts:

- 1) Remove most of the straw by baling; 2) Reduce the height of the stubble by flail mowing to less than 2 inches. A standard farm flail can be used, as well as a J-blade knife; 3) Remove the straw

and stubble after harvest as quickly as possible. Waiting 30 days can reduce crop yield by 30 percent; 4) Use a vigilant program of test monitoring and control. Without burning, there may be more pests remaining, such as weed seeds; and 5) Find the lowest-cost approach to production.

One method which has been tried is vacuuming the crop residue, which Chastain said is not economically sound. He main-

tains that today's baling and raking equipment is better than that of even a decade ago.

The crop physiologist concedes that burning is still the most cost-effective method, but argues that changes will have to be made. He has some concerns that, unlike Oregon, Washington has not allowed enough time for farmers to examine alternative measures. Again he stressed that what works in Oregon may not in Washington's turf-growing region, 300 drier miles northeast.

Oregon created an entire industry out of the residue of turf crops, using baling and flailing after mowing. Developed during the six years of the burning phase-down, straw barns were erected to store the stubble, which is compressed and sent to Japan as animal feed.

"But, it took years and years to build those facilities in Oregon," said Chastain. "In Oregon our yields are right up there with Washington's without burning and using the bale and flail method. But, the caveat is that it is more costly when done under Oregon conditions."

According to Skip Allert of Jacklin Seed Co. in Post Falls, Idaho, just across the Washington state line, growers tried to bale the straw after being combined, but without much success. It is more expensive and does not kill weed seeds or diseases. (Chastain noted that OSU had not seen an increase in diseases when fields weren't burned, but added that the studies were not extensive and, again, what works in Oregon may not work the same in another area.)

Time, or the lack of it, appears to be the major obstacle facing the Washington growers. Whereas Oregon, which still allows burning of 10 percent of its 400,000 acres of turfgrass, gave its growers years to develop new methods, Washington effectively slammed the door on burning, reducing it by one-third each year to total abstinence next year.

As Allert noted, "We need more basic research... what genes to change... But there is a costly time lag — a year before we get the crop out, another year to see the results."

There is little question that alternatives to burning are available. From all indications these are more costly than incineration. Those growers with the financial resources to make the change will probably survive, and marginally capitalized growers may go out of business.

In the meantime, researchers in the private sector and at universities are continuing their efforts to find an economically feasible way to manage turf crops, for there is also little question that smoking fields, like smoking tobacco, is now taboo.



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