Arizona-based ryegrass issue up in the air

By MICHAEL LEVANS

PHOENIX — A controversy that Oregon seed companies thought was put to bed has been stirred yet again.

In mid-August, a group representing Arizona wheat farmers asked the Arizona state Agriculture Department to reconsider its decision to allow ryegrass planting on golf courses this winter.

In July, the Arizona Farm Bureau Federation asked Agriculture Director Sheldon Jones to ban ryegrass seed from Oregon, the nation's largest supplier, unless it is certified to be free of fungus believed to cause Karnal bunt.

The request was the latest attempt by Arizona farmers at lifting restrictions imposed by the federal government. According to recent reports, last year's federal quarantine on Arizona wheat cost the industry $100 million, while Karnal bunt was found in less than 4 percent of the state's fields.

Oregon's Department of Agriculture recently met with Arizona. The consensus was to wait until findings were gathered from a bunt and smut disease symposium that took place on August 18-20 in Washington, DC.

"The Arizona wheat growers want help in getting this zero tolerance of Karnal bunt removed for exporting," said Michael Robison, president of Corvallis, Ore.-based Seed Research of Oregon Inc.

"They have a lot of wheat in storage that they can't ship."

William Walsh, president of the Rio Verde Country Club in northwest Phoenix, said Arizona's economy would have been hard hit by a ryegrass ban.

"The financial impact to the state would be devastating," Walsh said. "We don't have a ryegrass issue."

Fertilizer makers dig in for battle

ICM Vigoro restructures, increases distribution's role

By MICHAEL LEVANS

WINTER HAVEN, Fla. — In the midst of increasingly intense competition, IMC Vigoro's Professional Products Group, the maker of fertilizers and slow-release products, has eliminated its entire internal direct sales force and has axed its unprofitable product lines in an effort to concentrate on R&D.

"It's a move that reflects that the industry is very competitive," said Tom Pasztor, director of communications for IMC Global Inc., parent company of IMC Vigoro. "Our customers are..."
Whitbread's eight existing courses and will be the exclusive manufacturer and maintainer for the eight courses under the watchful eye of Myrtle Beach National Co. Toro already has agreements on the books with Canadian Pacific Hotel Group and Valderrama, the home of this month's Ryder Cup matches. For Ransomes, Myrtle Beach is its fifth contract.

From an administrative standpoint, the deals seem to make sense. From the management side, companies get a total package which helps cash flow and the company's yearly budgeting process. From the manufacturer's side, the company can easily track equipment maintenance records, allowing the equipment maker to take a piece of equipment back and keep it in circulation with more confidence.

Outside the financial benefits, the deals create "a mutually beneficial comfort level" between the two parties, said Peter Whurr, director of marketing at Ransomes. "When you put a deal together, the customer benefits because he knows he now has a direct route into the company. It's more of a business partnership, even though he's still the customer. We can now say, 'If you want some help, just call us.'"

"It allows us to put together a total package," said Don Masini, managing director of international sales at Toro. "Following that, it's easier for us to follow up and keep in contact with the customer in order to meet all their needs," Masini said.

According to Masini, the exclusive provider deal was an American concept that is growing, and will continue to snowball, overseas, where management group ownership is skyrocketing.

"Outside the U.S., there aren't that many that are pay and play. So funding is getting more difficult," said Masini. "If you don't have the funds then you can't improve the golf course, and the members don't want to increase the dues they're paying."

"It's about achieving a comfort level for everyone involved," said Whurr. "We sat down with them [Myrtle Beach National Co.] around a table, asked them what they needed and how we could get there. It was the first stage of a closer relationship."

For Myrtle Beach National, the issue boiled down to cost and time savings. "We were spending too much time and money on the repairs of equipment we had kept too many years," said Clay Brittain Jr., chairman of Myrtle Beach National. "This caused a lot of downtime. When we decided to bring our equipment up to date, Ransomes came to us with an exceptional package."

"When a management company enters into one of these agreements it's almost like leasing a car," added Toro's Masini. "At the end of the agreement, they can walk away and get a new one or they can purchase it. Either way, it keeps newer, well-maintained equipment on the course."

Masini believes exclusive partnerships are simply going to snowball. Whurr heartily agrees.

"There's a much better relationship between the two parties," said Whurr, who added that Ransomes currently has a number of deals in the pipeline.

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**IMC Vigoro**

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Demanding better quality products, more innovative products. To improve the profitability of the business, we're going to take that money and plow it into R&D as well as additional quality improvements." Vigoro said that its Professional Products Group will now only market through a network of 70 worldwide distributors supported by a veteran sales team.

"Our link to the customers will now be through the distributors," said Pasztor. "We believe that to be a much more efficient way to do business. These are established distributors, so nothing will skip a beat," Pasztor said.

In addition, the company has stopped manufacturing its "low-volume, marginal products." This, the company said, will permit it to concentrate on its most popular products, those responsible for more than 90 percent of its net sales, such as Par Ex and Woodace.

"The products eliminated were high Specialty products that accounted for less than 10 percent of total sales," said Pasztor. "The lion's share of what a golf course superintendent has come to count on from IMC Vigoro will continue to be produced."

"These actions are expected to improve the Professional Products Group's profitability and enable it to more aggressively pursue new product development and quality improvements," said Frank Wilson, IMC Vigoro's president. "Our objective is to serve our customers better, reduce our costs and position the business for long-term industry leadership. We believe this restructuring will accomplish that goal."
lease or purchase arrangements. The competition amongst designers is so strong today that most of us have added services to differentiate ourselves, often called "added value packages."

It is little wonder that golf course developers are often confused about the golf course designer selection process. Price point alone would confuse the majority. It is possible to encounter fees for design services that range from fifty thousand dollars to over a million. Understanding the scope of services, and comparing them between various design firms, is a worthwhile exercise for the person making the selection.

Whenever the situation presents itself, which must be early in the planning stages, we encourage potential clients to begin their project with a professional business plan supported by a market and feasibility study. Preferably the study will be produced by someone experienced in the golf business. Several firms are specializing in that field and are recognized by financial institutions as creditable.

One focus of such a study must consider who the golf course is being built for; residents, public, resort, or a combination. The study must identify the competition, i.e. comparables in the area. A marketing strategy for the golf course should be developed. The strategy should define the style and type of course, determine if a design "name" is important and address issues of maintenance standards, management, pricing, membership and promotion. Only after the study has been completed should the ownership begin to determine who will be asked to submit design proposals.

The depth of services that any one design firm can bring to a project varies greatly, as we have mentioned. The first time golf developer will benefit greatly from affiliating with a firm that can offer a full package of services that incorporates design, facility use and management. An experienced golf course developer may be better served working with a designer who focuses only on that element of the project.

Trying to be completely objective, we would recommend to anyone contemplating the development of a new golf course, or the renovation of an existing course, that they carefully identify their reasons for doing it, the market they are attempting to serve and that they evaluate their own experience and knowledge of golf.

The course designer should be selected based on the experience of that firm relative to the goals of the project. A review of candidates for the design phase can then be more focused and help to avoid the confusion factor.

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"Or I'll have to arrest you, sir."

"Sound like a bad joke? Well, in the midst of his busy schedule of bringing about global peace and answering those terrible hounds charging corruption that leads to his door, President Clinton took the time to sign an Executive Order outlawing smoking in the vicinity of federal properties.

Now, keep in mind that our military operates more than 200 golf courses around the country, and you get the picture. In the Muslim countries they have religious police, who make sure women remain veiled in public and that everyone prays when called upon to do so four times a day. Here, we can do them one better: Smoker Pokers, armed and ready coppers who will put you in the pokey if you smoke.

Well, at least we won't have to deal any more with those scores of stogey and cigarette smokers sullying our golfing experience. By the by, keep your eye peeled for a class-action lawsuit being brought against the 15,000 golf courses in America by those many people who got cancer from second-hand smoke while golfing.

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Strem, eastern states and Canada.

Brian Smith, vice president of international sales, will lead the sports turf sales group in addition to his international agricultural responsibilities. Reporting to Smith are three regional managers: Dine Unaran, Europe; Salim El Ghazal, the Middle East; and German Aces, Central and South America.

"We are confident that this new structure will allow us to reach our objectives of focusing on customer relationships with a sales team support concept," said Kolb.

"It comes down to it. I'm sure they'll put their weight behind it too."

The tourism and the nursery industry is trying to help wheat farmers by writing letters urging the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Congress to lift restrictions on Arizona wheat.

Tests of this year's crop have revealed no blackened or "bunted" kernels.