**SUPPLIER BUSINESS '99**

**ABT consolidation, integration continues**

**ABT** merges operations, moves towards consolidation

By ANDREW OVERBECK

HENDERSON, Nev. — AgriBioTech Inc. (ABT) marked the completion of the acquisitions phase of its three-pronged business plan by completely reshuffling its upper management.

Citing a need to shift gears into integrating and consolidating the 34 companies that ABT acquired since 1995, the company's board of directors decided in late February to replace Dr. Johnny Thomas, chairman and chief executive officer. Kent Schule, president and chief operating officer, and Brenda Shulman, president of the West Coast division, resigned in late March.

The board felt that former Lofas Seed president Richard Buhl and others would be better suited to operate the company as it moved into consolidation.

Budd, who joined the board of directors when Lofas was taken over by ABT in January 1998, is now chairman and chief executive officer and is joined by a new management team.

**New technologies, techniques paving the way...**

**Dry Sprayer takes overseeding to the next level**

By ANDREW OVERBECK

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. — Turf Solutions has developed the Dry Sprayer, a machine using new overseeding technology that dramatically increases the speed, accuracy and germination time over standard overseeding techniques. Adapting air-blast technology commonly found in agricultural equipment, the Dry Sprayer blows seed directly into the turf canopy.

"We have modified this ag-based small crop machine into one suitable for turfgrass applications," said John Wicker, president of Turf Solutions, the service arm of local distributor Southeastern Turfgrass Supply. "We built our first machine three years ago and we do the final assembly, modifications and shipping out of Jacksonville.

The Dry Sprayer features a 1,000-pound ground-driven hopper-unit that distributes seed via a clutch-driven paddle to tubes that run down to the 16-foot boom. The seed, which is blown at a speed of 65 mph, then hits diffusers that run along the length of the boom, orienting the seed downward and blowing it into the turf canopy.

"The ground-driven distribution system ensures even application of seed and forces it through the thatch layer providing better seed-soil contact," said Wicker.

"This leads to better germination, uniform coverage and a reduced outlay of seed by 10 to 15 percent."

The Dry Sprayer is ideally suited for fairway applications and can cover 120 acres in one day. "We typically make two passes with split applications and with three or more machines we can easily do a course in one day," said Wicker. "One machine on a course could easily handle 25 to 30 acres a day, a significant time savings over traditional overseeding.

**Metallic Power gets boost for zinc/air power**

By MICHAEL LEVANS

SAN DIEGO — Metallic Power Ltd. has been awarded a $350,000 contract from the California Energy Commission’s South Coast Air Quality Management District to demonstrate a prototype zinc/air fuel cell-powered riding electric greensmower by January 2000.

The company will collaborate with the Toro Co. on the project.

"With this contract we’re now on a rapid trajectory to develop the zinc/air fuel cell technology," said Jeff Colborn, Metallic Power’s chief executive officer. Founded in 1995, the company has won more than $1.5 million in government research and development contracts.

The zinc/air fuel cell combines zinc pellets, approximately 1 mm in diameter, with oxygen. The reaction takes place in the presence of potassium hydroxide, the liquid electrolyte found in alkaline disposable batteries.

**Seed Research and Advanta sign marketing and research agreement**

By ANDREW OVERBECK

CORVALLIS, Ore. — In an effort to improve and enhance its current coolsseason turfgrass offerings, Seed Research of Oregon (SRO) has acquired the North American turfgrass marketing program of Netherlands-based Advanta Seeds Inc. In addition, SRO has assumed responsibility for Advanta’s turf and forage seed production.

Terms of the agreement were not disclosed.

The two companies have also agreed to participate in a cooperative research program to develop new and improved turfgrass varieties through conventional breeding and biotechnology.

"We are entering into cooperative breeding projects, primarily in perennial ryegrass, tall fescue and Kentucky bluegrass, and we will also be getting into genetic engineering," said Mike Robinson, president of SRO.

The research agreement between SRO and Advanta will manifest itself in new products down the line, according to Robinson.

"There are 160 varieties of perennial ryegrass and they are relatively similar," said Robinson. "We would like to come up with something that is unique and there is a lot of work going on in Europe at the moment."

The agreement gives SRO an instant fix to what it saw as an inadequate cool-season grass program. "With all the species that we work with and the expansion of our warm-season grass program it is hard to keep the intensity up," said Robinson. "We were toying with two new breeders before we talked with Robinson.

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**Zinc pellets charge the zinc/air fuel cell.**
ABT changes
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Budd’s task is to make ABT, which many industry experts think grew too much too fast, financially solvent again.

“We are working to create a profitable and productive future for our customers and the company and put the growth and consolidation challenges behind us,” said Budd.

Ind. Seeds
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“Ask the microbes in your soil, they’ll tell you. LiquiGreen™ is a slow release, non-burning organic source of nitrogen that is safer to use and delivers more consistent results.

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Dry Sprayer
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“The Dry Sprayer also eliminates the need for crews to "beat" the seed into the turf. "We just mowed right behind it and we were done," said Davis.

Turf Solutions has built several Dry Sprayers and uses five of them in its service fleet, which has 50 accounts throughout Florida, Georgia and South Carolina.

Thanks to word of mouth, interest in the Dry Sprayer has extended beyond the Southeast. "We have gotten calls from people in California and Arizona," said Wicker.

With demand on the rise, Wicker expects to ramp up assembly next year with production slated to be around 40 to 50 units. The Dry Sprayer retails for between $15,000 and $18,000.

While Wicker admits that this new technology could catch the eye of larger equipment manufacturers, he plans to keep it.

“We are not actively seeking out larger companies with this,” said Wicker. "Our name is trademarked and we have patents out on the design characteristics. Our hope is that they’ll come to us."