John Deere unveils products, prototypes at feedback program

By ANDREW OVERBECK

MOLINE, Ill. — John Deere unveiled two new products and several prototype models during its recent feedback program here at its company headquarters in Moline.

This year’s feedback program, which took place at Pinnacle Golf Course, hosted approximately 550 superintendents from all 50 states and all over the world including Japan, Australia, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Norway, Sweden, Austria and Germany.

The program is designed to introduce superintendents to new products and to get feedback on prototypes.

“We have already started tabulating the results,” said Chuck Greif, manager of market development for John Deere’s golf and turf division. “We want to implement some changes in products before the GCSAA show in February.”

Greif pointed out several product changes in this year’s models that were made in response to last year’s feedback session.

“We added new control arms on the trim mowers, improved seat positioning, added a new suspension seat on the fairway mower as standard equipment, and revamped the clutch in the Turf Gator to make final changes before entering production in early 2002,” Greif expects the B-series to be available in the spring.

The company also unveiled its first rotary flex deck for roughs. The 72-inch three-unit deck has rear rollers for stripping and has a larger degree of flex than the current 72-inch Lastec model currently available.

PROTOTYPES ABOUND

In addition to the new products, John Deere is building 30 of the B-series units to field test worldwide and then will make final changes before entering production in early 2002. Greif expects the B-series to be available in the spring.

GCSAA refines e-commerce strategy

By ANDREW OVERBECK

LAWRENCE, Kan. — In a series of meetings in mid-August, the GCSAA decided to drop the idea of creating a neutral exchange as a part of its e-commerce initiative and has moved in favor of concentrating solely on the more traditional storefront model.

After a 60-day pilot program, and numerous meetings with suppliers and feedback sessions with superintendents, the association chose to abandon the controversial exchange format that would have charged a transaction fee on every purchase that was made through the site.

“We have simply refined the plan,” said chief financial officer Julian Arredondo. “This is not a failure. The pilot was intended to show us what people wanted and what would work. Suppliers got pretty anxious, but we wanted to test it and get feedback. The decision to concentrate on the storefront model was made by the board because they felt like the message was strong and clear that both buyers and sellers wanted to move in that direction.”

However, XS Inc., the GCSAA’s e-commerce partner, has more experience developing neutral exchange models, like Xsag.com. Arredondo does not see a problem with this. “They are our technology partner,” he said.

“The way that they operate in other industries is up to them. The way they operate in this one will be different because we both understand what the industry needs.”

MAXIMUM FLEXIBILITY

According to Arredondo, the storefront model gives suppliers and distributors maximum flexibility.

“It will essentially be an electronic version of the existing relationships that are in place between the superintendent and the supplier,” he said. “Both sides were more comfortable with that model.”

The new site, to be unveiled later this year, will function as a portal to direct superintendents to industry suppliers. There will be storefronts for companies that do not presently have a Web site and links to companies that already have an Internet presence.

“That was the idea from the beginning,” Arredondo said. “Many companies have already invested in their own sites. We will offer those who haven’t an Internet solution. But everyone has different needs, so flexibility is key.”

EPA approves PTI’s PRECISE acephate

SYLACAUGA, Ala. — Pursell Technologies Inc. (PTI) has gained approval from the Environmental Protection Agency for the first polymer-coated insecticide formulated with PRECISE technology.

The patented PRECISE coating technology developed by PTI allows gradual release of pesticides via osmotic diffusion.

The company’s first product is an acephate granule that has substantial application flexibility. The product works as either a preventive or curative control for fire ants, mole crickets, sod webworms, cutworms, armyworms and chinch bugs.

Research is currently being conducted to determine grab control efficacy.

“The high water solubility of acephate lends itself well to being polymer coated,” said Jeff Higgins, vice president of sales and marketing. “We have taken an insecticide that is considered to be short lived in the soil and extended the longevity of the product.”

The PRECISE acephate granule product is under limited production at a pilot plant in Sylacauga, but PTI plans to construct a plant to handle production of the entire line of future PRECISE insecticide, fungicide, herbicide and combination products.

“A fungicide such as Metalaxyl is probably the next material we will coat using PRECISE,” said Higgins. “Our testing has identified several materials that would be ideal.”