

## Companies making compost tea push

By ANDREW OVERBECK

MARTINS CREEK, Del. — Sensing opportunity, many compost tea and brewer suppliers are now targeting the golf course industry.

One golf supplier, EarthWorks, is set to unveil its compost tea "kit" at the GCSAA Show this month. The organic fertilizer and biostimulant maker is primed to take advantage of the move towards sustainable turfgrass management.

"EarthWorks as a company has done a good job with soil management," said president Joel Simmons. "We think compost tea will take it to the next level."

According to Simmons, the company started investigating compost tea when President George Bush and Al Gore were facing off in the 2000 presidential campaign.

"A lot of people were afraid that if Gore got in they would lose a lot of their pesticides," he said. "It was already happening in places like San Francisco and Suffolk County, New York. We began to develop our compost tea kit to solve the problem."

EarthWorks will be marketing a kit that contains four 10-pound bags of compost, four bags of activator and four bags of cleaning solution. The kits will come with three pre-paid tests from Soilfoodweb, Inc. The company will initially market a 30-gallon brewer that it will either make in-house or outsource.

EarthWorks has sourced its compost material from Amish farmers in Lancaster, Pa., and has made 20,000 pounds so far. While Simmons has yet to set prices, he said the cost-per-acre would be in the \$10 to \$20 range.

### WEST COAST BREWERS

On the West Coast, another brewer company, Growing Solutions, has already made inroads into the golf market. Since 1998, the company has been providing brewers and compost materials to the agriculture and golf markets and has just rolled out a second-generation machine.

"Our first commercial machine aerated the compost and water with nozzles," said manager Jeff Hilty. "Our new system forces air in through fine bubble diffusion disks which increases the volume, improves efficiency and reduces cost."

The new brewers will come in 25, 100 and 500-gallon capacities

and will cost \$1,295, \$3,995 and \$9,995 respectively.

### GROWING THE MARKET

Both companies are bullish about the growth possibilities in the golf market.

"We see our sales growing in the golf market," said Hilty. "We are seeing a trend towards organic mandates and people look-

ing to biological means of controlling disease."

Simmons, who started EarthWorks back in 1988, is equally optimistic.

"When we started the company people called us every name in the book," said Simmons. "Soil management is more mainstream now and we have had unbelievable inter-

est at our compost tea seminars."

Simmons, however, is quick to point out that between Eco Soil's BioJect problems and other "bugs-in-a-jug groupies," his industry has more than a few black eyes.

"This is still a bit esoteric," he said. "It still comes off as brewing beer in the basement and being unsophisticated. But there is science in this. It will take time, but we just need to position this and make it commercially available."



Growing Solutions' 500 gallon brewer with aerators (inlay)

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## Compost tea

Continued from previous page

"It will take scientific evidence before superintendents are going to risk their jobs. In the real world they have to provide good turf conditions on a daily basis and most aren't willing to take that leap of faith." ■

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