While the tone of Golf 20/20's first annual Golf Industry Report is upbeat, there are several disturbing trends that emerge from the data.

Two are not so surprising, new golf construction is down and rounds played numbers remain as flat as a two-by-four. No shocker there.

But there are more troubling statistics. Construction numbers are not only down, but, of the courses that opened, an increasingly smaller number of them are public access. The number of public courses opening still far outnumbers private courses, but the trend is unnerving just the same. When you combine those numbers with the fact that all of the 27 courses that closed permanently in 2001 were either daily-fee or municipal layouts, the alarm goes off.

I thought the industry was supposed to be focusing on providing more affordable, public-access golf – not less.

At the conclusion of last year's Golf 20/20 conference the message was clear: we need more affordable golf courses to grow the game of golf. The American Society of Golf Course Architects and others have certainly pushed the message and put a plan in action to promote the need for more affordable golf, but clearly more needs to be done.

Watching ill-advised, high-end, country-club courses struggle in today's market has likely poisoned the desire of any developer to build a lower-end public golf facility. If you can't make money at $75 a round, how the heck can you make money charging $30 a round, right? Wrong.

Take a look at the front page of Golf Course News this month. Architect P.B. Dye just wrapped up work on a $1.5 million, 18-hole golf course in Indiana that offers outstanding golf for $38 a round including range balls and a golf car.

Sure, a number of things worked in his favor. He's leasing the land, did the construction work himself and largely used his own equipment. But the lesson here is the strategy he used. Dye built as high-quality a golf course as the market conditions could bear. Then he took a number of smart, cost-cutting measures to reduce the construction expenses even further.

Except for one machine, all the maintenance equipment is used. All the Rain Bird irrigation heads were purchased used for $5 a head. The course was designed to fit in with the land and thus 250,000 cubic yards of earth were moved. The greens were constructed out of a topsoil mix and they used only four truckloads of sod to lay one strip around all greens and some of the fairways.

The most brilliant cost-saving move involves the course's bridges. Instead of building steel I-beam structures, they purchased tractor-trailer decks from a Cincinnati scrapyard for $500 an acre. With the steel and wood decking already in place, they saved a ton on materials and labor costs.

All of these steps do not detract from the beauty or playability of the golf course. The well designed course was meant to be rustic, but it still provides great golf, and that's all the golfing public wants.

Is this possible at every new golf course? No, of course not. And there is still a market for high-end golf. But there are hints here that could help developers make affordable golf pay off.

The message is still clear: Keep the golf course simple, and as Dye said, let the golfers "go out there, beat the ball around and have fun." Now the industry just has to convince developers to listen.

Is this possible at every new golf course? No, of course not. But if we can get one of these machines to work, we can present the following information to ODA:

Dr. Tom Hodges of Purdue University and senior author on seven patents specifically related to hybridization of grasses, submitted the following information to ODA director Phillip Ward for the recent hearing held in Jefferson County:

"I am writing regarding the transgenic bentgrass field trial by Scotts/Monsanto in Jefferson County, Ore. As you know, this trial involves open-pollinated bentgrass that contains the Roundup herbicide-resistance gene. Although I am a strong advocate of genetic engineering, this particular project is extremely dangerous because pollen escape to other grasses has a high probability of causing the development of herbicide-resistant grassy weeds as well as the fertilization of related Agrostis species. This could have disastrous effects on the turfgrass seed industry because of the contamination of genetically engineered seed with non-engineered grasses as well as the lack of control of herbicide-resistant grassy weeds in all crops including herbicide-resistant crops such as corn, wheat and soybeans. If this trial is allowed to proceed, the damage it could cause is considerable, and this damage will give the anti-biotech forces major ammunition in their fight against all genetically engineered crops."

This letter states the fears I have on this project.

Genetic modification of crop plants for the production of not only food and fiber, but also energy, pharmaceuticals, and structural products is the future of agriculture. However, the Willamette Valley is prevented by statute from participating in genetically modified bentgrass, even if the transgenic bentgrass is male sterile. Male sterility is obviously not understood despite testimony pre-