WHY PUSH WHAT YOU CAN’T DEFINE?

Remember when we used to talk about “IPM” programs? Integrated Pest Management was the standard phrase for all of the care and attention towards the environment when it came to managing golf courses.

The new buzzword? Sustainability. The word gets dropped by many superintendents and companies trying to market their products for use in our industry. While I'm a huge fan of the idea of sustainability, I am often confused by exactly what is meant by the term.

I have asked many people to define sustainability, only to receive various definitions... in addition to a few blank stares. Andrea Li, assistant golf superintendent at Connaught Golf Club in Canada, said sustainability is designed “to preserve the longevity of the golf course environment for our future generations of golfers.”

Via Twitter, @Aquatrols relayed the International Golf Federation's definition of sustainability as “Optimizing the playing quality of the golf course in harmony with the conservation of its natural environment under economically sound and socially responsible management.”

In my opinion, sustainability is no different than IPM. In integrated pest management we utilize all resources available to us to provide a product. We take into account the economy as well as the environment. Isn't this similar to maintaining a course in a sustainable way?

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The answer is there are costs and benefits for everything. If we were truly sustainable we would all walk to work, grow our own food, and consume only what was necessary. We surely wouldn’t drive our gas-guzzling trucks, eat store-bought food, or indulge in anything considered unnecessary to sustain our lives.

Although it may seem like I’m anti-sustainability, the exact opposite is true. I feel we all can improve our management practices through proper IPM strategies. However, we should stop worrying about why others don’t do it like us and focus on what we as individuals can do in our specific cases. What is considered sustainable at a Minnesota muni course is not going to be the same at a West Chester, N.Y. private club.

Superintendents should work together to share programs and discuss what really works. If so, then the industry will continue to improve. We must stop placing one definition on sustainable turfgrass management.