

MAINTENANCE MATERIALS:

PRICE AND SUPPLY TRENDS '73:

No shortages of fungicides or insecticides seen; Fertilizer prices hold steady; Equipment trending to interchangeable units; Seed supplies and price seesaw
by FRED V. GRAU



How will my budget hold out? Will I be able to get what I need when I want it? Should I stockpile?

These and many other questions are on the minds of superintendents as they meet with their chairmen and their boards to develop their 1973 budgets. Hopefully, the following survey, which is a cross-section of opinions from representatives within the industry, will help answer their questions.

CHEMICALS The costs of producing many chemicals are up sharply, due in large part, to the cost of trying to meet and keep up with governmental regulations. Registration and labels now must be fulfilled in 50 states, not just with the Federal government.

The rumor mill, if allowed to run unchecked, could be responsible for temporary shortages caused by buyers stockpiling or hoarding when there is no need. Prices for some herbicides, such as phenoxy materials, may be up as much as 8 per cent on the retail level, but there exists no real shortage of materials.

Fungicide prices tend to remain stable in spite of the unpredictability of weather, which could cause a sudden demand for certain chemicals designed to combat specific turfgrass diseases. We must remember that many manufacturers have been under price control ceilings. These held selling prices down, but had no control over production costs. Now that controls are relaxed, we can look for general increases. Meanwhile, no shortages are in sight. The word is, "don't

hoard—buy as needed," just as with herbicides. When a price seems out of line, check with alternative sources.

FERTILIZERS The story is the same on the East Coast and on the West Coast. Prices of fertilizers will hold steady with little or no price increases. In the Midwest, where sales have begun to exceed plant capacity, we may see slight, temporary increases, but nothing major.

New formulae, which contain high percentages of slow-release nitrogen (as most turfgrass fertilizers do), will hold steady or show slight increases. Here, again, "buy as needed." This year, superintendents might do better to ask for low-phosphorus mixtures, because phosphorus is in short supply and could affect prices or formulations. Many turfgrass soils are over-supplied with phosphorus anyhow.

Ureaforms, long the standard for slow-release materials, are feeling pressure from resin-coated prills, which contain less costly ammoniacal and nitrate nitrogen. In some formulations each resin-coated prill contains an homogenous blend of N-P-K and trace elements, each prill identical in content to every other one. IBDU from Japan shows promise, but does not seem to be in general use. The most exciting news comes from a manufacturer that has produced what could be termed a time capsule, which, when blended with potting soil, feeds container-grown plants steadily and adequately for two years. Another

continued

MAINTENANCE *continued*

manufacturer has gone the route of packaging its ureaform in the dealer's own bags. No price increase is predicted under any regime.

The picture for white soluble sulfate of potash (sprayable) continues to be cloudy. A plant at Salt Lake City that should have been on stream a year ago seems to be having a hard time getting this desirable turfgrass product on the market. Little is known about the price structure, but one can assume that it will stay in line, a bit higher than muriate of potash because of the plus value of the sulfur. The word is, "Keep the pressure on for soluble sulfate of potash and check all sources of supply." Prices will remain stable.

EQUIPMENT

There is a note of optimism concerning new equipment that eliminates frills and extras which, while nice, do little for economical maintenance. The name for 1973 equipment in a large measure is interchangeable units. These are not frills, but can be termed innovative efficiency. An increase in price? Yes, but moderate and commensurate with improved efficiency. Selective, modest price increases along the line may be expected, but budgets will not need to be altered that much. Obsolete equipment will give way to the new labor-saving, efficiency machinery, one of which is a vertical mower for fairways that has powered units. Increased efficiency does not mean a lowering of turfgrass quality—actually the quality improves with more sophisticated machinery.

One midwestern manufacturer is concentrating on the necessity of processing the cores that result from aerating putting greens. Despite the costs of research, redesign and advertising, no price increases are anticipated and no problems of availability are foreseen.

SEEDS

Several factors are affecting supplies and prices of seeds of all kinds. Last summer, in the producing areas of the Pacific Northwest, hot dry winds at flowering time reduced seed set and lowered yields.

Restrictions on field burning of

stubble (to control diseases and insects) have hiked production costs, which eventually will be reflected in the selling prices of seeds. Abnormally wet conditions in sections of the mid-continent made harvesting almost impossible. A cutback in highway construction also drastically reduced orders for erosion-control seeds. Because production continued unchecked, a market glut was created with prices greatly reduced. Crownvetch was one that was seriously affected.

It is of considerable interest to learn that proprietary grass seeds will show little change in price structure. The reason is that the dealers in the using areas contract with growers at a fixed price. Thus, the law of supply and demand is inoperative. Prices remain stable whether there is a large crop or a small one. Non-proprietary items fluctuate with supply and demand. We can expect husky price increases on some of these items, lower prices on others.

Redtop and tall fescues exhibit the greatest price increases. Harvest was affected by the abnormally wet weather. Demand is strong.

Red fescues are selling sharply higher, perhaps 30 to 50 per cent over 1972. Prices are considerably above those for the non-proprietary bluegrasses. Seedsmen say that they cannot recall a time when fescues cost more than bluegrasses.

European buyers favor the colonial and highland bents. But low demand for these items in the United States have resulted in a significant drop in prices. Astoria colonial, for example, is selling at about half the price that it brought a year ago. The answer seems to be that these grasses have been largely replaced in seed mixtures by superior types.

Certified Penncross bent remains unchanged and supplies appear to be adequate. Fairway quality Penncross, certified, may be in moderately short supply. Demand has been strong.

Bluegrasses tend to be up in price, but the increase is moderate. There seems to be no shortage of any item except in the proprietary, named varieties. Merion tends to remain constant and in adequate supply. "Poa-annua free" on the label brings the price up a bit.

Demand for Pennstar and for Fylking is strong, but prices hold steady. Supplies of Fylking are adequate, but Pennstar will be in short supply until next harvest. Prospective buyers are urged to plant minimum poundage and stress better seedbed preparation and adequate fertilization to conserve available supplies.

We cannot pinpoint all the newer proprietary bluegrasses, but here are some of the other better-known varieties: Sodco, just about adequate; Baron, good supply, price down; Nugget, short supply, price up; Sydsport, should be enough, price steady; Prato, plenty in sight, no increase; Bonnieblue, very little in sight. (The name Bonnieblue may have to be changed; seems someone else had it first.); Kenblue, plenty to meet demand; Adelphi, very little seed available; Park, good supply, quality excellent, and Prato, ample supply, price steady.

Now we come to a most interesting phase of the turfgrass picture—that of the fine-leaf perennial ryegrasses. Each has a story to tell: Norlea, a Canadian import, has lost favor and is not even listed in the releases; Pelo, strong demand, should be in adequate supply, price steady; PaloMoRa blend, supplies may be sufficient to meet demand, no increase; NK 100, demand strong, should be enough; NK 200, new, short supply, limited distribution; Manhattan, heavy demand, supplies barely adequate, and Pennfine, there probably will not be enough supplies to meet the heavy demand.

A word of caution comes from a grower for those who buy by price. Some unscrupulous growers and dealers are offering uncertified Manhattan ryegrass at a lower price. Tests show that these cheaper lots contain from 3 to 10 per cent annual types, which are coarse-bladed and do not mow clean.

Contracts for Pennfine specify that only certified seed can be grown and sold. So, insist on certified seed for quality turf.

Not enough data came in to allow me to say more about Medalist II, Compas and Epic. There will be others soon. We expect the new varieties to be in short supply for a while.

continued on page 56

The Ryan Minute-Miser multi-purpose utility turf vehicle.



Big, soft 6.50 x 8 turf tires.



Hauling a 3-gang ball picker.



Easily tow up to 250 lbs. of tools, chemicals, spikers, trash containers, and other equipment. Low-cost low-bed utility trailer with big 35" x 66" bed available as optional equipment.



Saves the minutes that help pay for the hours!

When it comes to wasted work-time the Ryan Turf Minute-Miser is a stingy vehicle...but very generous with the savings it returns on your investment. Whatever the grooming responsibilities (golf course, park, plant ground, cemetery, et al.), you'll find the Minute-Miser a rugged, quality built mobile utility tool...no corner-cutting construction. Eliminates "clock-eating" walking. Gets you or your workers to the job without tying up a golf car or other equipment as a range vehicle. Features a powerful 8hp engine; capable of doubling as a lightweight towing vehicle. Responsive acceleration...zips to a safe and smooth cruising 15 mph. The Ryan Turf Minute-Miser shrinks your wasted minutes; stretches them into productive hours.



TURF EQUIPMENT
Outboard Marine Corporation
1718 Cushman Drive
Lincoln, Nebraska 68501

For more information circle number 156 on card

MAINTENANCE from page 54

For emphasis I repeat here that pricing on proprietary, named, varieties holds steady because of contracts at fixed prices with growers. It is the available supply that gives us concern.

One factor that has strengthened the bluegrass market is a short crop in Europe with domestically grown seed being exported in large amounts.

Merion demand is off a bit due partly to excessive moisture in the Midwest, which prevented fall seeding. Some sod growers in the East are reducing Merion in their blends and adding other varieties.

Fylking production was off about a third because of excessive moisture, which produced turf instead of seed.

BLENDS

Monoculture is a "dirty word" in turfgrass circles for the most part. The professional turfman today has more flexibility than he has ever known. Nearly everyone is talking blends. Each grass, no matter how good it is, has one or more weak spots. Common bluegrass is highly susceptible to *Helminthosporium* leafspot. Merion is resistant to leafspot, but is vulnerable to rust and stripe smut. In a blend, the strength of one grass masks the shortcomings of another. *Fusarium roseum* can be highly destructive and disfiguring to a monoculture turf of Merion, but may not even be discernible in a blend of bluegrasses.

Now, with the new turf-type ryegrasses blending so well with the superior bluegrasses, we have a wide range of choices for our mixtures. If one is in short supply, just switch to another.

Turfgrass blends are not yet thoroughly accepted by the sod-buying public. Merion, the one that started the whole parade, is still the magic word with many, although this is beginning to change. Vegetative types, such as A-20 and A-34 are in widespread use and supplies seem to keep pace with demand. Wet weather hindered harvesting, moving and laying of sod over wide areas. These vegetative types are beginning to shift toward seed, which is an easier way to establish turf.

Harsh winters seem to be giving

the newer ryegrasses a hard time. We don't know the answers yet.

There will be attempts to improve prices for sod, which in some cases have been at a "dollar-trading" level. Some figures indicate that many sod growers would show a loss if they counted all costs. Eastern-grown sod could be in short supply in late 1973 because of the adverse weather in 1972. Top quality turf should bring about a one cent per square foot increase in 1973. Average quality sod will remain stable.

A factor that, so far, has been overlooked is that, with wheat in strong demand and short supply, and with prices bullish, many acres now producing turfgrass seeds will be growing wheat. Many acres that had been producing crownvetch seed will be planted to corn and wheat. We can look for an increased acreage devoted to the production of alfalfa seed. Prices are at a 10-year high. Although alfalfa is not a turfgrass, everything affects everything else in one way or another.

Native grasses appear to be stable. Bermudagrass yields were good and prices should be a bit lower. Odd, but no one even mentioned common ryegrass except in connection with increased wheat acreage at the expense of common ryegrass.

SUMMARY

The word across the board is, "Keep cool." There's no need to stockpile or to hoard. Budgets need not be increased more than 3 to 5 per cent, depending on the items needed.

The words, "substitute freely" express the trend when one item is in short supply. Don't drive prices up abnormally by applying excessive buying pressure.

When a desirable seed is in short supply, try to use the least quantity that will assure results. Many experiments over the years have shown that superior results come from reducing the quantity of seed sown and increasing the amount of fertilizer. By all means, employ the type of equipment that is a miser with seed and which places the seed directly in contact with moist soil.

Buy the best; it will prove to be cheaper in the end. □