

TURFGRASS MATTERS

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Contract Renovation

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For most golf courses in the Mid-Atlantic the end of summer brings an annual ritual of turfgrass management tasks. It can be overseeding, aerification, fertilizer applications or all of the above. All of us have different approaches to this monumental undertaking. Some Superintendents close the course and do everything at once. This works extremely well at multiple course facilities. For others closing is out of the question, so other methods are used. Timing is also important. Some clubs start early in August before summer crews return to school and members are away on vacation. One is thing sure - renovation is never easy and always unpopular. Did you ever consider not doing the work by contracting the work out?

In the past few years several companies in the Mid-Atlantic have started specializing in aerification, seeding, and fertilizer applications. Today, Superintendents have the option of contracting out the entire workload or perhaps renting equipment and/or operators. Renovation takes equipment, labor and materials such as seed and fertilizer. A business decision needs to be made. Is it cheaper to buy the equipment and use your staff or

contract the work out?

Equipment is the most expensive issue. A club can have tens of thousands of dollars invested in equipment literally used one or two days annually. In addition, it has to be stored, maintained, and depreciated. There are obvious advantages to purchasing equipment as well, the biggest being scheduling. The equipment is there when you need it. If you have some aggressive programs in place or have thirty-six (36) holes where the equipment might be used for weeks, it is probably worth the investment to purchase equipment

Labor is another important factor. Do other jobs go undone while your staff is completing renovation? Do you pay overtime wages? Renovation today is very mechanized but we still need skilled labor. How many of us are scheduling this work too early in August because we loose staff after Labor Day?

Materials must be considered as well. Take it from me, it is difficult to overseed without seed. There are frequently seed shortages right when we need it the most. I don't envy the seedsmen in August and September. Getting seed harvested, bagged, and

shipped coast to coast while competing with similar industries is a difficult job. Bulk spreading of fertilizer can work extremely well. At times, I have seen the same material spread cheaper than I could have bought the bags. Other times the scheduling and logistics can be a nightmare.

Contract renovation is one of those buy vs. lease scenarios that are always difficult to make. I have had good success presenting these dilemmas to my club's committee and board members, most of whom are successful business people. They may not understand aerification but they understand money. For some of us older Superintendents in the Mid-Atlantic that remember manual irrigation and no fairway spraying, nothing is more satisfying after a difficult summer than ripping a large goosegrass plant to shreds with the seeder. Good luck this fall.

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