



TURFAX™

of the International Sports Turf Institute, Inc.

The International Newsletter about Current Developments in Turfgrass
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BEWARE - WOLF IN SHEEP CLOTHING

One of the essential steps in the early planning phase of new turfgrass facility developments is the gathering of technical information prior to making a final decision. A principal source of technical specifications is from the manufacturer and/or marketer. This is a logical early step. Each source of information will most commonly emphasize the positive features and advantages of that particular product, which is the norm.

The next step is to seek impartial, comparative information about promising candidate products. There are five sources commonly used to varying degrees in securing this needed information. Unfortunately, some sources of information which traditionally have been viewed as impartial that have become tainted in recent years.

Testing Labs. Testing labs, such as for physical and chemical characteristics of soil, have been viewed as an impartial source of technical information, not only for the actual analyses, but also for the sources of various root zone mix

components. Unfortunately, some labs have become allied with certain suppliers of possible components. Thus, the question needs to be asked when contracting with a lab as to whether they have or will derive any monetary benefits, direct or indirect, from suppliers.

There also is the question of accuracy in analytical performance standards which appear to vary with some labs, particularly physical soil testing laboratories.

Independent Consultants. The first priority in consultant selection is to ensure that the proper expertise is possessed in terms of formal education and "real-world" experience, plus proven success. It also is important to select a consultant who will provide you with an impartial assessment, particularly in relation to products one may be considering for purchase. Be sure to ask the consultants whether they have in the past or currently have any arrangements with specific companies marketing products from which they derive benefit as a result of their sale and use.

Tax Exempt Organizations. A tax exempt organization that provides technical information to turfgrass practitioners must act as an impartial representative in order to sustain its tax exempt status. However, if the organization promotes a product from which it derives financial (ie. royalty) gain to the detriment of other equal or better products, they can be subject to a loss of this tax exempt status. Concerns in this regard should be raised with the appropriate governmental agency.

University Technical Specialists. Traditionally universities have sustained a reasonably impartial stance relative to various commercial products on the market. The internal university climate has changed in terms of the ability of individual faculty members to patent inventions, including by definition grass cultivars, and to subsequently share in the royalty income from the sale of these patented products. This change can adversely affect the impartiality if a particular product results in a personal monetary gain. Remember, it is not only what is said but what is not said that can be important. Fortunately, the faculty at most universities remain impartial as far as technical information.

The best source of reliable technical performance information is from detailed, replicated, comparative studies by an independent agency, that has been published in a peer-reviewed scientific publication.

Fellow Colleagues. Seeking input from respected individuals who have used the product is an important source of information to those considering purchases. However, one must be sensitive to the possibility that the decision-maker involved in the purchase, who has subsequently experienced problems with the product, may not wish to communicate these problems because that individual would not want to be embarrassed for failing to make a correct decision.

In this regard, be sure to note that four years is required after a given root zone construction and/or a turfgrass cultivar is installed before final conclusions can be drawn as to the relative success or failure. Most innovations should be good the first year, but the true test is sustained performance during increasing soil density, thatch, insects, and other stress problems. Also, even the best of root zone constructions or turfgrass cultivars may not prove successful if improper day-to-day cultural practices are used by an unqualified turfgrass manager.

FIRST STATE SEED FIELD BURNING BAN

The State of Washington has banned field burning of grass seed production areas state wide. There will be a two year phase-out. Approximately forty thousand acres (16,200 ha) of bluegrass (*Poa*) seed production is in jeopardy. It is of interest to note that no burning ban was applied to wheat, potatoes, and timber production areas. Burning is valued due to a substantially higher seed yield, which is attributed to physiological effects and disease/insect control. Will other Northwestern States follow? Will a significant portion of the grass seed production move to other countries?

UPCOMING INTERNATIONAL EVENT:

July 25 to 27, 1996. 1996 TPI Summer Convention & Field Day. Hyatt Regency Hotel, Sacramento, California, USA.

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The goal of the six issue per year TURFAX™ newsletter is to provide international turf specialists with a network for current information about turf. This newsletter is faxed to all Institute Affiliates that use the ISTI technical assistance services on an annual basis. Faxing is more costly, but ensures quick delivery to those outside the United States.

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