



Cutting Maintenance Costs

April 2012

As the new Green Committee Chairman, I am already feeling the pressure to identify ways to cut costs on the golf course, both now and into the future. Is there any guidance that can be provided for this ongoing concern?

Our agronomists field many questions each year on this very topic, and even provide specialized assistance during Turf Advisory Service visits.

Achieving greater economic sustainability can be an overwhelming task so let's simplify the scenario by sharing two basic philosophies that we frequently recommend. First, higher priority playing areas such as putting greens (including surrounds), approaches and tees should remain adequately funded. These important areas make up only a small portion of the course yet account for the most play. Rather, budget reductions are best realized in lower priority areas such as roughs and bunkers. Fairways and roughs comprise the greatest golf course acreage, meaning small changes can result in significant cost savings. Bunkers are expensive to construct and maintain, yet they are hazards and receive minimal play, i.e. usually just a few shots per round, so it makes sense to remove bunkers that are difficult to maintain or generally out-of-play, and reduce maintenance in others.

Second, all measures to reduce the budget should be identified as either cost cutting or cost savings. There is a distinct difference between the two. Cost cutting involves fewer dollars being spent with a corresponding reduction in the quality of the course. There is often some degree of long-term risk associated for the course as well, thus cost cutting should be avoided. Conversely, cost savings are opportunities where fewer dollars can be spent without changing course quality or standards. Examples include less detail work, reduced frequencies of certain maintenance tasks (e.g. bunker raking), and removing flower and ornamental beds, just to name a few. The appearance of the golf course may change, but playability should not, nor should there be any long-term threats posed to the course.

Obviously there are many factors to consider and what works for one course may not be an option for another. At the very least, it is hoped that the philosophies outlined above provide some general guidance going forward.

Useful Resources:

[Dollars and Sense: Making it in a tough economy](#)

[Getting Back in Balance](#)

[Firm and Fast, At Last!](#)

[Maintenance on a Shoestring](#)