



Investing in autonomous mowers will reduce labor requirements for daily mowing.

LABOR: SUGGESTIONS FOR SOLUTIONS

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The USGA article, “[Labor: By The Numbers](#),” outlined several reasons why superintendents are struggling to find and retain staff for golf course maintenance. Labor challenges are affecting many industries besides golf, and solutions will vary from one industry to another. If your course is facing labor shortages, consider implementing one or more of the following strategies:

Reduce maintenance in nonessential areas.

The idea of spending less time and money on nonessential maintenance practices has been discussed in many USGA publications and it makes sense to focus resources on priority areas such as putting greens, fairways and tees. Removing intermediate rough, eliminating flower beds and reducing the number of course accessories are great ways to free up resources for other areas. Additionally, developing low-maintenance areas that are only mowed one or two times per year can reduce labor requirements for mowing rough.

Implement nontraditional scheduling opportunities.

Several courses are hiring part-time employees and allowing them to work the hours and days that work best for them. The traditional model requires employees to show up early in the morning, but scheduling a later shift increases the number of potential candidates to hire. One downside to staffing evening shifts is that a manager must be available to coordinate and manage the shift later in the day.

Use the Aussie method of bunker raking.

This method involves raking only the bottoms of the bunkers on a regular basis while leaving the faces smooth. It helps to save time because the faces should only be smoothed again if they are disrupted. This practice also helps to firm bunker faces and reduce the likelihood for buried lies.

Invest in golf course renovations that reduce maintenance requirements. Fairway regrassing and renovating bunkers are two opportunities to reduce labor requirements and maintenance costs. These changes cost more money than the above solutions, but they should be viewed and analyzed as investments instead of costs because they can pay for themselves through decreased spending after they are implemented. Here are a couple of things to know about these improvements:

- New bentgrass varieties have been developed for improved performance and disease resistance. Regrassing with these varieties can reduce the total number of plant protectant applications that need to be made annually. As a result, less time is spent spraying and less money is spent on these products.
- Bunkers can be expensive to maintain, so simplifying the design and eliminating bunkers that are unnecessary, or that primarily target high-handicap players, can help reduce maintenance costs. For courses with steep-faced bunkers, installing porous aggregate bunker liners will reduce the frequency and severity of washouts during heavy rain events. Facilities that have installed these liners are certainly experiencing the benefits this spring. Renovating with a flat-bottom design can also help to reduce washouts.



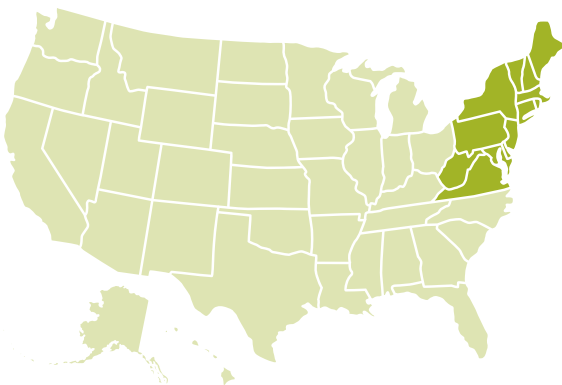
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Utilize new technology such as autonomous mowers and GPS sprayers. Autonomous mowers are increasing in popularity, especially in regions where the minimum wage has increased significantly and entry-level staff are difficult to find. With autonomous mowers, one employee can perform several tasks – e.g.,

blowing, bunker raking and ball mark repair – while the green is mowed to improve operational efficiency. GPS-guided sprayers are being used by more superintendents and can decrease the amount of product used by 10-20 percent in most cases by applying products more accurately. These savings can be reallocated to other areas of the course or used to help increase wages to become more competitive with other industries.

Hopefully, one or more of these techniques can improve operational efficiency at your facility so playing conditions can remain similar with less staff. Or perhaps reducing spending in some areas will make more money available to increase wages, helping to attract and retain staff.



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