

Oahu—The Gathering Place For Information

By Larry Gilhuly, agronomist, West Region

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It may not be the Mainland, and it may not be similar to any other climate in the U.S., but a recent tour of golf courses on Oahu and the recently-completed 2011 Hawaii Golf Industry and HGCSA/USGA conferences had very good shared information. Topics ranged from turf growth, playing conditions and what is going on in the 50th state. The following are a few of the interesting comings and goings learned in the Aloha state:



- **Times are changing.** During the Hawaii Golf Industry Conference, two very interesting presentations were given concerning the burgeoning golf market being created in China. Their interest in Hawaii is similar to what occurred with Japanese players back in the late 80's and 90's, but at a much greater level. Once the issue with visas is addressed, a massive influx of golfers will be coming to Hawaii to enjoy the many positives the islands provide. At this time, at least three golf properties have been purchased by Chinese owners, with more expected in the future. Within 20 years, the two speakers expect the total number of golfers in China to surpass the number in the United States! If this occurs, we all owe the Chinese a big "shey-shey" (thank you).

- **Seashore paspalum still provides a good alternative to bermudagrass.** This “niche” grass is now established at more than 50% of all the golf courses in Hawaii in some form on the greens, tees or fairways. Although it has its negatives, it is well-adapted to the cloudy winter conditions, poor water quality and desirable ability to compete with the many weeds found in the islands. Perhaps one of the best examples of success with this grass was at the Turtle Bay Resort, where Mike Honma produces high-quality playing conditions with this “sticky” grass. His trick? Low mowing at slightly more than ¼” on the fairways and greens eliminates the negative playing condition of this grass, as the seashore paspalum is more aggressive at a lower mowing height. Perhaps the most compelling reason why this grass has been so well accepted in Hawaii is that the players love the dark green color of the seashore paspalum and dislike the grain of the bermudagrass. This last subject, however, was one of the best discussed at the HGCSA/USGA conference at Mid Pacific CC.
- **Brushing is needed on both bermudagrass and paspalum.** During the 2011 USGA Green Section program at the Golf Industry Show in Orlando, Brian Whitlark, agronomist for the Southwest Region, provided information about **bringing back brushing**, an old program that is beginning to make a comeback on greens. The practice of brushing greens has fallen by the wayside over the past several decades, having been overtaken with various other forms of vertical mowing and grooming. However, newer types of passive and more aggressive brushes are being brought to the market, producing outstanding results with less turf stress. With hope, a reintroduction of this basic practice will produce positive effects at many golf courses.

As a final observation, it was good to see many golfers on the courses visited. Although the amount of play has not returned to what it was before the current economic woes, it appears that golf has leveled off and is looking brighter. And isn't that what paradise should always be about?

Source: Larry Gilhuly (lgilhuly@usga.org or 253-858-2266).

West Region Agronomists:

Patrick J. Gross, regional director – pgross@usga.org

Larry W. Gilhuly, agronomist – lgilhuly@usga.org

Brian S. Whitlark, agronomist – bwhitlark@usga.org

Blake Meentemeyer, agronomist – bmeentemeyer@usga.org

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