Let's talk turf with the Feds

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peak out for a new national turfgrass pro-
gram that the U.S. Department of Agri-
culture's ARS (Agriculture Research Ser-
vice) is starting. The program is in the
discussion stages. Because turfgrass re-
search always seems to get shunted aside
when it comes to federal funds, this is the
best time to give it all the support that we can.

The ARS is big

But, first a little about the ARS, the principal research
agency of the USDA. With 8,000 employees, includ-
ing 2,000 scientists, it conducts an incredible amount
of agricultural research, primarily on crops of food and
fiber. This involves 1,200 different projects in more
than 100 locations around the country. While some of
these projects focus on pasture and rangeland grasses,
none deal exclusively with turfgrass.

Here's how we can help change that.

We better be there

This fall, the ARS will host a workshop to discuss the
national turfgrass program, says Evert Byington, Ph.D.,
National Project Leader, Rangeland, Pasture and For-
age Research.

If we want to have a say in the program, we better
be there. When a date is set, we'll let you know

"We’re inviting all sorts of people with an interest
in turfgrass," says Byington. "It’s open to the public,
and we want people to express what they feel the re-
search priorities should be. Out of that we will de-
velop a strategic plan and start formulating what kinds
of research we will do as funding becomes available."

Byington says that the ARS conducts research that
academia and the industry don’t have the resources to
tackle. Initially, the program will concentrate on the
basic biology and genetics of turfgrasses. Later, it will
examine turfgrass systems more broadly, issues like
sustainable management and watershed modeling.

But there’s one more thing that we can do.

Let them know

Let’s contact our respective U.S. legislators and let
them know that we feel this program is vital. A phone
call or letter will get our point across—especially if we
follow up with friendly reminders. Let’s point out the
importance of turfgrass to our industry and to the na-
tion—its role in controlling erosion and ground water
pollution, as well as its obvious importance to lands-
capes, playgrounds and sports fields.

"We’ll be starting on the ground floor with this na-
tional program so we can build it the way it needs to
be built," says Kevin Morris, executive director of the
National Turfgrass Evaluation Program in Beltsville,
MD, where the program will be headquartered.

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Those of us with a direct interest in turfgrass
research should be at the Agricultural
Research Service workshop and help give
direction to the program.