

PROGRESS



Spreading the wealth

With the rise of chemical use and lush suburban landscapes, the 1950s facilitated the creation of the perfect lawn. By the 1960s and 1970s, that concept was a blossoming American obsession and the job of spreading plant food, lime and seed had become a necessity.

Since then, spreading and spraying via dusters, granular applicators, field sprayers and broadcast spreaders has become more sophisticated. When organics gained a solid foothold in the 1990s, topdressing applicators for compost teas and organic fertilizers became an integral part of the mix.

No one knows the evolution of spreaders better than Joseph Carrizales, sales, marketing and operations manager for White Castle's PSB division. Although White Castle is well known for its hamburgers, less known is its manufacturing of more than 3 million Scott's spreaders. "Our first drop spreaders were made from surplus WWII gun barrels, then to rotary, and finally to powered spreaders," Carrizales says.

Now, its high-end spreaders are made with stainless steel frames, fiberglass hoppers and plastic gears.

The mechanization of spreaders/sprayers also has grown in sophistication, based on modifications in large-scale agricultural machinery. "Our spreaders/sprayers started out as push-alongs, followed shortly after that by motorized walk-behind machines, and then stand-on-and-ride units, all by the late '90s," says Tom Jessen, president of PermaGreen Supreme. At the same time, L.T. Rich Products introduced its first ride-on spreader/sprayer.

From push-alongs to ride-alongs, sprayers and spreaders have modernized with the times.

Today's spreaders and sprayers offer more comfort and bells-and-whistles than early models did. PermaGreen's Triumph features ergonomic handlebars, fingertip controls, all-wheel braking, drop-down handles and more.

As contractors expand their businesses and bring on new people, it's more important than ever to make machines that are easy to operate and offer increased productivity, says Scott Kinkead, vice president at Turfco.

"Our new hands-free speed control makes operations easy," Kinkead says. "It reduces the learning curve and increases overall productivity."

L.T. Rich's Z-Spray offers its own set of luxuries. "We were one of the first zero-turn sprayers and spreaders on the market," says Sales Manager Andy Walters. "We incorporate a pressure gauge and a speedometer to ensure proper calibration. Our machines can even tell you the temperature outside and your average ground speed over the entire lawn. We are the only machine with a foam-marking system to allow you to see exactly what areas have been treated."

Topdressing, using organic topsoils and compost teas, is leaving its mark on the landscape industry, too. Once considered essential only in the maintenance of athletic fields and golf courses, it is now used on residential and commercial lawns.

And whereas topdressing used to be a cost-prohibitive option for smaller jobs, the advance of specialized spread-

ers/sprayers has changed that. Ecolawn president Daniel Cote says the invention of the Ecolawn Applicator topdressing machine helped bring smaller mechanical compost spreaders to new markets.

Tanks, tips and liquid pumps have become larger for high-volume organics. With the push for organics, leading spreader/sprayer manufacturers have adapted. "We are now offering different tip sizes and liquid pump sizes to accommodate the push towards organic fertilizers, compost teas and other products that require higher volumes," says L.T. Rich's Walters.

As fuel costs rise, spreaders/sprayers are becoming more fuel-efficient, and metering and guidance systems with LED light bars are gaining momentum.

Spreaders have come a long way from the days of the walk-behind drop spreaders of the 1950s.

So, operators can easily find the best routes to take and gauge the amount of treatments to spread or spray from area to area.

