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# Lawn & Landscape

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APRIL 2024  
Lawnandlandscape.com

BUSINESS  
BUILDERS  
PREVIEW  
PG. 36

DABBLING IN  
DOUBLE DIGITS  
PG. 38

OUT ON

## new LIMBS

It's a big decision when companies like DeSantis Landscapes decide to expand with branch locations.

Dean DeSantis,  
owner and president,  
DeSantis Landscapes





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Volume 45, Number 4

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LAWN & LANDSCAPE

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# IT'S ALMOST TOP 100 TIME!

It's hard to believe another year has gone by and our very next issue of Lawn & Landscape magazine will include our annual Top 100 List. Head to [bit.ly/lawntop100](https://bit.ly/lawntop100) to get one last look at the 2023 list and check out where everyone was ranked. You can also find an archive of previous year's lists dating back to 2005. And stay tuned next month for the big reveal of the 2024 Top 100 List. You won't want to miss it!

## WE WANT YOU TO WOW US!

Calling all design/build contractors! We're looking for great hardscape work to show off in future issues of Lawn & Landscape magazine. Please send a few high-resolution before and after photos to Associate Editor Kim Lux at [klux@gje.net](mailto:klux@gje.net). Make sure you include a brief but detailed description of the project including challenges faced, a timeline of the work, etc. For an example, look at [bit.ly/uptodateupnorth](https://bit.ly/uptodateupnorth). We can't wait to see all the amazing projects!



## SWEET DEALS ON A "SWEET" EVENT DOWN SOUTH!

The 2024 Lawn & Landscape Technology Conference will be held July 23-25 in Atlanta, Georgia! You won't want to miss out on this popular educational event. Make sure you attend to learn all about the latest software and technology opportunities that can advance your business. More information on the show floor, speakers and a schedule of events will be available at [bit.ly/LLtechconference](https://bit.ly/LLtechconference) as the event approaches. Register by May 2, 2024, to save!

**Lawn & Landscape**  
technology conference

## SCHOLARSHIP OPPORTUNITY FOR STUDENTS

We're accepting applications for our Richard Foster Award. The \$2,500 scholarship is available to outstanding students planning careers in the landscape, lawn care or horticulture business. To be eligible, students must be enrolled at a recognized two- or four-year college or university working toward a degree in horticulture, turfgrass management, agronomy, environmental science or another field related to a segment of the green industry. Check out the full details here: [bit.ly/lawnlandscapescholarship](https://bit.ly/lawnlandscapescholarship). Applications are due by June 21, 2024.





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**Brian Horn**  
Editor, Lawn & Landscape

“... I have a feeling, especially during the busy season, some people are dealing with issues as they happen while other tasks pile up.”

# Lessons from the 1700s

**A**s I sit here and write this on the first day of spring, the 34-degree temperature and smidge of snow on the ground doesn't have me thinking spring at all. But that's what I get for living in Ohio.

But what makes me think of spring are the lawn care companies showing up more in the neighborhood to fertilize and treat lawns.

Chances are, most of you are already in the busy season, where the hours fly by and you're exhausted at the end of your long day.

One piece of advice I have is a simple one that even I forget to do sometimes. I find I am much calmer and more organized with my tasks throughout the day when I make a to-do list to start my day.

Some of you may be saying “no-duh,” and that's great if this is a no-brainer to you. But I have a feeling, especially during the busy season, some people are dealing with issues as they happen while other tasks pile up.

Write it out on a piece of paper instead of using your phone. I tried it on the phone once and realized I don't need another reason to be glued to my electronic friend.

Leave that nearby where you can see it out and cross off each item as you accomplish it. Trust me, it's a good feeling.

According to an article on fastcompany.com, Benjamin Franklin used to-do lists back in the 1700s with tasks as mundane as wash, work, read and put things in their places.

You'll probably want something a little more detailed, but times were simpler back in the 1700s. And don't limit the list to just work tasks. Sometimes there are several personal items you need to complete. Maybe that's a separate list, but nonetheless important.

Hopefully, when you see this, the weather is warmer for everyone, and reading Lawn & Landscape can be crossed off your list.

— Brian Horn

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Keynote speaker Heather Monahan addresses LMN attendees in February.

## LMN's keynote speaker turns fear of the future into illustrious career

Heather Monahan stressed confidence and accountability during her presentation at the LMN Mastermind Summit.

By Jimmy Miller

**HEATHER MONAHAN** was out of her comfort zone recently speaking to attendees at Landscape Management Network's Landscape Mastermind Summit — and that's exactly what she wanted.

Earlier in the week, Monahan delivered a keynote for a media company. As someone who worked in media for several decades, she knew their pain points, she knew the people and she felt particularly confident.

While Monahan clarified that she was excited to talk in front of familiar faces, it didn't do much for her.

"Did that build more confidence for me? No," she says. "If we want to go for more...we've got to do things differently."

Instead, speaking in front of folks in the green industry for the first time built up her confidence even more. Monahan says this is the first trick anybody — including landscapers — should know.

"Everybody needs more confidence in their life, and you want to know why?" she says. "Confidence is directly tied to revenue. People buy from confident people."

Monahan insists that she wasn't always confident. She remembers running into people who believed she grew up rich, but she grew up living with a single mother who cared for four children. They lived in a trailer in Massachusetts and bought groceries on food stamps.

Monahan used to project this persona that wasn't her, especially back then, but she was attracting the wrong opportunities for her because of that. "The more you can show up as the vulnerable you... the more confident you become," she says, adding that people rally around that behavior and emulate it. "When we start doing that, we create bonds with people that are unbreakable."

She also talked about how a previous employer fired her, detailing how scary it initially was because she had lots of bills to pay. Monahan also worried about whether she'd be perceived as a failure, but instead, she reframed it as being in good company. She Google searched: "Has anyone successful ever been fired?" From there, she found plenty of examples like Steve Jobs and J.K. Rowling. So, she took to LinkedIn and posted something her friends and family felt was too vulnerable, asking for help from anyone who she had ever helped before.

That vulnerability led her post to reach viral numbers, so much so that Elvis Duran — a radio show with 10 million daily listeners — asked her to join the show for an interview. From there, Monahan launched two books, delivered a Ted Talk and is a renowned keynote speaker. In March, she delivered a talk in front of 170,000 people in Saudi Arabia.

"If I don't step into fear, things are not going to change," she says.

As for turning some of that discomfort into confidence — and then into measurable revenue — Monahan recommends starting with a written goal. She told attendees that people are 90% more likely to achieve something if they physically write it down. It's why people write grocery lists — that way, they won't forget what it is they need to achieve, or buy, at the store.

From there, she recommends finding an accountability partner. She asked attendees if they'd ask their peers at their tables to serve those roles.

"You are in the room with like-minded people with similar goals," she says. "People don't win alone — we win in teams."

*Read more coverage from the LMN event by going to [Lawn & Landscape's website](http://Lawn & Landscape's website).*



# ELM acquires Holmes Landscape Company

Larry Holmes founded the company in 1974, which provides commercial landscape maintenance and tree care services to the Oceanside, California, area.

**ENHANCED LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT**, a subsidiary of Landscape Development, acquired Holmes Landscape Company in Oceanside, California in March.

Holmes Landscape Company was founded by Larry Holmes in 1974 and provides commercial landscape maintenance and tree care services.

"There were many factors I had to consider after deciding to sell my company. My team of valued employees and the clients we have served for many years needed to be left in good hands," Holmes says. "As we came to know ELM and how they operate and conduct business, I decided that they were the right fit to give myself, my employees and clients peace of mind, now and in the future."

"An opportunity such as this does not come along very often. Holmes has an outstanding reputation, a 50-year legacy and over 130 talented landscape professionals that we added to our organization. Our company cultures, values and ways of doing business align," says ELM President Ron Reitz. "We also open a new market for us in the San Diego area, which has been a goal of ours for quite some time. This creates tremendous opportunities for all our team members as we continue to grow."

"Holmes Landscape Company built an excellent reputation in the San Diego Market and, like LDI, is committed to providing its clients peace of mind," says Mark Crutcher, LDI's president and CEO. "Holmes is known for high quality work, extraordinary responsiveness to its clients' needs, and a strong employee team. We are very excited to welcome the Holmes management team and field workforce of over 130 employees with the experience and knowledge they bring into the LDI family."

"This is an excellent addition to our maintenance business," says Gary Horton, LDI founder and executive board chairman. "We expand our reach of landscape maintenance and tree care services into the San Diego region as we continue to deliver our full suite of services to our ever-expanding client base. ELM continues to pursue acquisition opportunities throughout California and the Western States as we execute our maintenance segment growth strategy."

"I thank all our leadership and entire staff who, working collaboratively, have made our rapid growth both possible and profitable," Horton adds.

Larry Holmes will remain with the company through the integration process and HLC Vice President, Lee Frank, will continue to oversee the local operations as part of the ELM management team. Gary Horton founded LDI in 1983. The company currently operates from 13 regional offices throughout California and Southern Nevada and employs over 1,300.

**"Holmes Landscape Company built an excellent reputation in the San Diego Market and, like LDI, is committed to providing its clients peace of mind,"**

**— Mark Crutcher,  
LDI's President and CEO**

# Senske Services acquires Turf Doctor in Maine

As Turf Doctor joins Senske Services, they will now operate under the Blades of Green division with Brad Leahy, COO of Blades of Green.

**SENSKE SERVICES**, which provides lawn care, pest control and home services, has acquired Turf Doctor, a provider of professional lawn care and pest control services in Augusta, Maine.

Turf Doctor was founded by Michael Russo in 1997. Senske Services ranked No. 45 on Lawn & Landscape's Top 100 list last year.

"I am confident that Senske is the ideal partner to carry on the legacy of Turf Doctor," Russo says. "Their commitment to customer service and environmental

responsibility aligns perfectly with the values that

have defined our company."

"We are thrilled to welcome Turf Doctor into the Senske Family of Companies," says Casey Taylor, Senske Services CEO. Michael Russo and his team have built an outstanding organization, and we look forward to continuing their tradition of excellence in lawn care and pest control services."

As Turf Doctor joins Senske Services, they will now operate under the Blades of Green division with Brad Leahy, COO of Blades of Green, overseeing both operations.

"We are proud of the team we have built at Blades of Green, and we are excited to welcome our new colleagues to the company," Leahy says. "We look forward to continuing to grow and add more states in the Northeast."



## Grasshopper Lawn acquires ForBetter Green Tree & Lawn

Grasshopper is backed by HCI Equity Partners.

**GRASSHOPPER LAWNS** in Larksville, Pa., acquired ForBetter Green Tree & Lawn, headquartered in Lehigh Valley, Pa. Grasshopper Lawns is backed by HCI Equity Partners, a private equity firm partnering with lawn care providers in the region. The transaction was completed in March 2024.

Marty Sukley, owner and founder of ForBetter Green, established the business in 2014. Sukley embarked on his career in 1986 at HydroLawn in Conshohocken, Pa., swiftly advancing to the Lehigh Valley

office before the company was acquired by TruGreen.

Following his tenure as a sales manager, Sukley redirected his focus to tree care at Valley Arborists in Center Valley, Pa. He also helped expand Forever Green Landscape and Tree, which later merged with Plantique.

Grasshopper Lawns provides weed control, fertilizing and other lawn services to customers in the Scranton/Wilkes Barre and Allentown, Pa. metro areas. HCI Equity Partners, a private equity firm partnering with lawn care providers in the region, has partnered with Custom Lawn Care (Butler, Pa.), Delaware Valley Turf (Broomhall, Pa.), and Brookside Lawn Service (Medina, Ohio) in addition to Grasshopper Lawns.

"I've known Marty for over 30 years," says Bob Williamson, Pest & Lawn Director at Cetane Associates. "He's a great guy and he built a wonderful company. It was a pleasure working with him and we wish him all the best in his next chapter."

**"He's a great guy and he built a wonderful company. It was a pleasure working with him and we wish him all the best in his next chapter."**

— Bob Williamson,  
Pest & Lawn Director  
at Cetane Associates,  
speaking about Marty  
Sukley, who founded  
ForBetter Green.

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## Ethoscapes acquires Houston Landscapes Unlimited

The acquisition expands Ethoscapes' greater Houston footprint in commercial landscaping.

**ETHOSCAPES** has acquired Houston Landscapes Unlimited, one of Houston's commercial landscape and irrigation contractors.

HLU joins Ethoscapes' family of brands, which include Westco Grounds Maintenance, Champions Hydro-Lawn, Outdoor Development and Tree60. Their personnel now includes over 700 employees and serves over 600 commercial, municipal and residential clients in the Houston metropolitan area.

Houston Landscapes Unlimited was founded in 1983 by Dean Carpenter. Over the years, HLU continues to serve

customers including NRG Park, University of Houston Athletics Department, Space Cowboys Stadium, various retail and office parks and established communities including First Colony, Riverstone, Telfair, Imperial, Aliana, Cinco Ranch and Meridiana Community.

"We are delighted to welcome HLU to the Ethoscapes family. Their stellar reputation and dedication to excellence align perfectly with our values and vision for the future. This acquisition strengthens our position in the market and enhances our ability to provide comprehensive landscaping solutions to customers," says

Manny González, CEO of Ethoscapes.

"Joining forces with Ethoscapes presents exciting opportunities for our team and our customers. Together, we will leverage our combined expertise and resources to set new standards of excellence in the landscaping industry. We are eager to collaborate with Ethoscapes and contribute to their continued success," says Dean Carpenter, president of HLU.

Ethoscapes is a portfolio company of Evolution Strategy Partners.

"This strategic acquisition marks a significant milestone in Ethoscapes' expansion efforts and underscores its commitment to partnering with companies who deliver unparalleled quality and service," says Stenning Schueppert, managing partner of Evolution. "I have no doubt that HLU will provide the same level of top-tier landscaping services backed by a team of skilled professionals as all of Ethoscapes' landscaping brands."



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## McHale Landscape Design acquires Musgrave Lawn & Landscape

This marks family-owned McHale's fourth acquisition in five years.

**MCHALE LANDSCAPE DESIGN** has acquired Musgrave Lawn & Landscape. This marks family-owned McHale's fourth acquisition in five years.

This acquisition will fortify McHale's presence in the Gibson Island/Millersville/Severna Park/Annapolis markets. McHale ranked No. 64 on Lawn & Landscape's Top 100 list last year.

"Our commitment to excellence extends to strengthening our foothold in the Gibson Island — Severna Park market," says Steve McHale. "The latest initiatives

underscore our dedication to providing quality services in this thriving community."

Keith Bowman, McHale's president of horticultural services and business development, highlights the positive impact on our Annapolis-based Maintenance Team.

"This development marks a significant addition to our Annapolis team, enhancing our capabilities to deliver exceptional maintenance services. We are excited about the positive effect this will have on our operations," Bowman says.

"These strategic moves bring added design build resources to our team, reinforcing our ability to serve our clients more effectively," says Founder Ryan Musgrave. "We are confident that this will result in an even more robust experience for our valued clients."

**"We are confident that this will result in an even more robust experience for our valued clients."**

— Founder Ryan Musgrave

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**L&L INSIDER**

## Schill Grounds Management acquires BAM Outdoor

The company provides commercial landscaping, lawn care and snow removal services near Indianapolis.

**SCHILL GROUNDS MANAGEMENT** is expanding westward into the Indianapolis area with the acquisition of BAM Outdoor, a locally owned and operated company that provides commercial landscaping, lawn care and snow removal services.

BAM serves the Indianapolis market, including the suburbs of Westfield, Carmel, Fishers and Noblesville, and plans to expand service across the entire Indianapolis metro area. BAM's clients include numerous multi-family complexes, homeowner associations, logistics and distribution facilities and other commercial customers. BAM's service area is adjacent to Schill's territory in Cincinnati and Dayton, Ohio, and extends Schill's reach deeper into Indiana.

Like Schill, BAM provides year-round comprehensive commercial landscape management services that include lawn maintenance, lawn care, and snow and ice removal services.

BAM's owners — Jeff Kontor, Jared Winn and Michael Linton — will help oversee the integration into Schill and will continue to have active leadership roles in growing the business across Indianapolis.

The trio were employees of BAM Outdoor for many years and bought the business from a previous owner in 2019.

"Jeff, Jared and Mike

brought an entrepreneurial spirit and ownership mentality to BAM that we admire and respect, and we are delighted to add them and their employees to the Schill family," says Jerry Schill, who founded Schill Grounds Management 30 years ago and serves as its CEO. "BAM has a terrific culture that aligns with our values, and we look forward to growing the business together."

After partnering with BAM, Schill has about 1,100 employees and continues to grow organically as well as through acquisitions. Revenue numbers were not disclosed, but BAM has roughly 150 employees, all of whom will be retained.

Schill plans to retain the BAM name and branding in the Indianapolis market, and BAM plans to make additional acquisitions in Indiana and beyond.

BAM is Schill's 12th acquisition since 2020. Schill ranked No. 33 on Lawn & Landscape's Top 100 list last year, jumping all the way from No. 82 from the year prior.





## Virginia Green acquires L.S.L. Lawn Service in Maryland

This marks the company's first acquisition outside of Virginia.

**VIRGINIA GREEN**, a provider of lawn care and exterior pest control, landed its first acquisition outside of Virginia with the purchase of L.S.L. Lawn Service in Maryland. This move marks a milestone in the company's growth and opens doors to serving new customers in a new market.

"We are thrilled to welcome L.S.L. Lawn Service and its dedicated team to the Virginia Green family," says Gil Grattan, CEO of Virginia Green. "Their longstanding commitment to customer satisfaction and their deep understanding of the Maryland landscape perfectly align with our values. This acquisition allows us to not only expand our reach, but also offer L.S.L. customers access to our comprehensive suite of services, designed to make their outdoor spaces more enjoyable."

"We are excited to join forces with Virginia Green and offer our customers an even wider range of high-quality lawn care solutions," says Larry Lawrence, former owner of L.S.L. Lawn Service. "Together, we share a commitment to sustainability, customer satisfaction and building strong relationships within the communities we serve."

**"Together, we share a commitment to sustainability, customer satisfaction and building strong relationships within the communities we serve."**

— Larry Lawrence, former owner of L.S.L. Lawn Service.



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## Massey Services restructures Northeast and West Florida regions

The regions will both be divided by two service types: Consumer (Pest and Termite) and Landscape Care.

**MASSEY SERVICES** has restructured its Northeast and West Florida regions in efforts to optimize its service.

The northeast region, which includes the Jacksonville market, and the west region, which includes the Tampa market, will both be divided by two service types: Consumer (Pest and Termite) and Landscape Care.

Under the restructuring, Marcelo Aponte and Philip Chatham will assume leadership roles as newly appointed regional managers in the Northeast region. The west re-

gion will be managed by Frank Oliva and Rick Block, who have both served as regional managers for the last several years.

Marcelo Aponte joined the Massey Services team in 2016 as a general manager in training. Most recently, he held the role of division manager for the three service centers involved in the acquisition of Peninsular Pest Control in downtown Jacksonville. In this capacity, Marcelo helped integrate and foster relationships with new team members and expanding Massey's customer base. Aponte will now serve as the regional manager of Consumer Northeast.

Philip Chatham joined Massey in January 2013 as a sales inspector. Most recently, he served as the general manager of Massey's Clermont service center and was just recognized as a 2023 General Manager of the Year for the company. Under Chatham's promotion, he will take on the role of regional manager of Landscape Northeast.

Frank Oliva has served as the regional manager of the West Florida Region since January 2021. In recognition of his exceptional leadership, Oliva will transition into the role of regional manager of the Consumer West Region. In this new position, he will continue to spearhead the Pest/ Termite Service Centers in the West Florida Market.

Rick Block, who joined Massey in December 2011 as a general manager in training, has served various roles in operations. Most recently, Block served as the regional manager of the Northeast Florida Region. In his new role, he will take on the position of regional manager of the Landscape West Region.

"We have seen tremendous growth in both the Northeast and West Florida

markets, and we saw an opportunity to further enhance our service excellence by creating these new regions," says Tony Massey, president and CEO of Massey Services. "These four regional managers have exhibited exemplary leadership and commitment to our company's mission, and we are confident that under their guidance, these regions will continue to thrive and our team members will continue to provide exceptional service to our customers."

**"We have seen tremendous growth in both the Northeast and West Florida markets, and we saw an opportunity to further enhance our service excellence by creating these new regions."**

**— Tony Massey,  
president and CEO  
of Massey Services.**

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# NALP launches educational Roblox game

Landscape Design Empire is intended to teach young players through an immersive virtual learning experience while they design, install and maintain landscapes.

**THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF LANDSCAPE PROFESSIONALS** Foundation has just released its Landscape Design Empire learning experience on the virtual platform Roblox, one of the largest virtual platforms in the world with millions of users.

Designed in collaboration with Epic Reach, Landscape Design Empire offers young players an immersive virtual and interactive learning experience while they design, install and maintain landscapes.

"We are so excited about the opportunity to reach tens of millions of players on Roblox and teach them about the benefits of caring for the landscapes around them," says Jenn Myers, executive director of the NALP Foundation.

Landscape Design Empire is meant to be played with friends who can share their landscape designs with each other. They can also create landscapes for clients and gain reputation with them. They'll maintain the landscapes they've built, unlock new skills and jobs, and collect and use landscape tools. New features will be added regularly.

The foundation launched Landscape Design Empire to ensure that young players develop a foundational understanding of managed landscapes that may inspire environmental stewardship and foster a curiosity about landscape careers.

"As an industry, it's crucial to adapt to new mediums to reach



and educate younger demographics. Landscape Design Empire represents a creative approach to fostering an interest in landscaping from an early age," says Chris Joyce, the foundation president.

The virtual platform also allows for collaboration with industry brands that can incorporate their equipment into the playing experience.

For more information about Landscape Design Empire or to support the work of the Foundation, visit its website or contact Jennifer Myers.

Users can experience Landscape Design Empire on Roblox.com and using any device including PC, Mac, iOS, Android, Amazon devices, Xbox consoles and Meta Quest VR. ■

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE NALP FOUNDATION





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# BRANDSPOTLIGHT ▶

## WITH GREENE COUNTY FERTILIZER COMPANY



**John Perry**  
President/CEO/ Founder  
Greene County  
Fertilizer Company



# From Deficiency to Efficiency

It's no secret that the lawn and landscape service industry has had its fair share of problems finding high quality employees or even regular folks that just want to work.

This isn't a uniquely lawn and landscape related problem, but it seems that it's on every owner's mind who is struggling to find a solid path forward for accelerated growth.

In a recent meeting this topic came up again and I presented to the group this thought: perhaps it's only an issue because we're making it an issue. My reasoning for that statement is simple, it's easy to complain about the quality of employees without realizing that we are poisoning our own respective wells. It's very easy for your own staff to pick up on these comments, to make their own judgements about the workplace and then to share those thoughts out-

side of the workplace, creating a sense that their job or career is on an unstable path. Anytime uncertainty about the future enters a person's mind, panic and unrest soon follows.

Perhaps this is nothing new to you, your corporate culture is top notch, you have an endless stream of quality applicants and you are turning away people because they just can't wait to work for you.... Or perhaps that's a fairy tale. But there has to be a way around this, right?

In the fertilizer and chemical world, we have a solution for every problem related to turf grass. Fungus? Fungicide. Weeds? Selective and non-selective herbicides. Nutrient deficiency? Fertilizers of all types for anything that may be lacking. Drought? Wetting agents, polymers and smart irrigation. It seems



like with all the innovation that we should be able to solve the labor crisis too, right?

How about no. Perhaps it's time to proactively turn towards using the technologies available in our industry to increase our current employees' efficiencies. It is likely that you are already utilizing tools in this regard to increase the production of your employees in the field. Ride-on sprayer/spreaders have in many cases gotten bigger and more powerful, enabling a single employee to cover more ground than ever before. But these bigger production units have downsides as well including training, limited access on some properties, additional equipment to haul and support the unit and so forth. This is all well and good but if you aren't taking other options to decrease time on site or space between visits, you are right back to where you started.

Maximizing applications of materials while on site is the best way to become more efficient and more profitable. Stacking add-on services like liquid aerations, moisture managers and soil building applications can increase revenue without additional crews. Combining the correct balance of soluble and slow-release fertilizer at the correct time of year can also create additional space between visits. This can allow for a larger and more dense route for your technicians with less chance of call backs.

When I look at the fertilizer world, I want to eliminate waste and increase the return on everything that's being applied. My perspective is that any nutrient or chemical application has a measure of the waste that can be reduced. I have always considered the soil in my quest to get better results out of fertilizer applications as the soil has to do the work and losses will compound in an out-of-balance system. Utilizing this knowledge, carbon components are added to nutrient solutions to reduce leaching, increase availability and lower the amount of nutrients needed to get the desired result. This type of thinking allows for higher profitability for our customers and lowers the loss rate of materials applied.

Maybe you are thinking, "what does that have to do with staffing?" Well, the idea is that you look for waste and eliminate it or look for ways to increase your employee's



profitability while on site.

It's often easy to overlook pathways to greater profitability when we are stuck in reactive mode rather than proactive mode. Adding additional, simple services offerings to your business will create a workspace with less stress, higher margin and ultimately happier customers and employees. It's important to look for opportunity when it feels like there is none. Ask yourself these questions:

Am I taking positive advantage of the workforce I have? Am I too focused on growth and not on stability and profitability? Am I focused on deficiencies or efficiencies?

Once you see where you stand, call us. At Greene County Fertilizer Company, we've focused on efficiency from day one. Our products have been designed to ease the pain of operators and to create new and innovative solutions for outdated techniques. Everything you need to increase fertilizer efficiency; water efficiency and technician efficiency is right here under one roof. Best yet, you're dealing with the source. Materials are often shipped the same day that they are ordered and are delivered to your business' doorstep. We make it simple so that you can continue to grow your business while we grow your grass.

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John Perry is President/CEO Founder of Greene County Fertilizer Company

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## MATH ON MOWERS

→ **DAVE RYKBOST, PRESIDENT OF DAVE'S LANDSCAPE IN HUDSON, MASS.,** wanted to more accurately calculate his mowers' cost per hour (CPH) rates to ensure that he was charging enough for his equipment. I told him that first we needed to determine how many hours were put on his machines each season as well as for their lifetimes. So off to his shop and yard we went. Climbing over 60-inch riders, walk-behind and stand-on mowers, we wrote down the hours on each of his machines. Once we had that data, we could then proceed to calculate how much his mowers cost per hour to operate. We would then enter the CPH information into my MS Excel pricing worksheet for Dave's two-man mowing crew and calculate his rate to charge customers.

**ASSESS THE NUMBERS.** Run-time hours on Dave's stand-on mowers were roughly 500 per year. Riders were getting a little less while the walk-behind mowers were accumulating a little more. Past experience told us that lifetime hours for the rider mowers would be 2,500 hours. The stand-on and walk-behind mowers would not last as long, and we estimated their lifetime at 2,000 hours. I prefer to be somewhat conservative with the lifetime hours and generous with the maintenance costs when calculating the CPH for trucks and field equipment.

I also like to trade in or sell these machines when they reach 75% of their lifetime hours. This allows me to get a maximum amount before major repairs usually happen occur.

**CALCULATING THE CPH.** There are three separate CPH components to consider when calculating the CPH for a truck or piece of equipment. They are the acquisition, the maintenance and the fuel components. First is the acquisition cost per hour. Our 60-inch rider mower will cost us about \$16,000 plus sales tax. We plan to include financing for three years at 5% interest, pay a 6% sales tax and sell the unit after four years and about 1,700 hours for roughly \$3,500.\* Our acquisition CPH calculates to be \$8.62 or 55% of the lifetime cost to own this item.

Maintenance is the second component. In addition to all of the maintenance services, I include either truck and auto insurance, or inland marine insurance, in this category. If there's a cost or man-hours expended to maintain a vehicle or piece of equipment, it goes here. Since in-house mechanics tend to be hard to quantify for specific items, I tend to use market pricing from vendors to estimate costs. The maintenance CPH for our 60-inch mower is \$3.34 or 23% of its lifetime cost.

Finally, we estimate the fuel CPH. For field equipment, I estimate how many gallons the specific piece will consume during normal usage. In the case of the 60-inch mower, I used one gallon per hour at an average cost of \$3.50 per gallon. I calculate the fuel CPH for trucks and

automobiles as follows: I estimate the annual miles driven and divide it by the average miles per gallon. This provides the gallons consumed per year. Then I multiply the gallons per year by the average cost of the fuel per gallon.

This gives us the annual cost of fuel, which we divide by the estimated annual hours for the vehicle. The result is the fuel CPH for the vehicle in question. For our mower, fuel costs us \$3.50 per hour or 22% of its lifetime cost.

To obtain the 60-inch mower's total CPH, we add the CPH for all three components together. In our case, the total CPH is \$15.66 (\$8.62+\$3.54 + \$3.50). Interestingly, the total CPH for rider, stander and walk-behind mowers tends to be about \$1 for every thousand dollars of purchase price. No such correlation exists for vehicles, smaller hand-held equipment (edgers, trimmers, blowers, etc.) or larger field equipment such as skid steers, excavators, loaders, etc.

Once we completed our calculations, Dave felt confident that he could accurately calculate the cost per hour to operate his equipment on his mowing and maintenance routes.

Since he also had the annual hours used for each piece of equipment, he could accurately estimate each machine's daily usage by reverse-engineering its monthly, weekly and daily hours.†

**ONE FINAL COMMENT.** Dave and I had neither perfect nor complete data when calculating these CPH figures.

However, we had ample data to do so. Use the process illustrated in this example to cost out your field equipment. **L&L**

  
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\* (Truck and Equipment MS Excel worksheet for these calculations.)  
† (See the MS Excel 2024-12 Man mow crew pricing worksheet.)



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**WORDS OF WILSON** features a rotating panel of consultants from Wilson360, a landscape consulting firm.

# THE BACKBONE OF YOUR BUSINESS

→ **COMPETENCY IS NOT JUST A BUZZWORD.** Competencies are fundamental sources of competitive advantage that show the public what you're good at and why your business is different.

There is no fixed number of competencies, but the more ways you can define and measure your vision and mission — from morale to profitability — the more you can set your business apart. How many should you have? Most firms include innovation in quality and delivery; operational excellence; customer experience; and an organizational culture defined by creativity, productivity and employee engagement. Teamwork, people-first, sustainability and continuous learning are also critical strengths.

When an organization invests in its intellectual capital, it has a positive impact on all aspects of organizational growth, from clarity and direction, to employee quality and workforce performance, making it easier to train and promote people from within. This "rising tide lifts all boats" approach is a differentiator. It shows employees you walk the talk on company values, it gives them something to grow toward and strive for, and more importantly, it works as a critical retention strategy for employees and customers. By training on what your organization does best and investing in doing it better, it's not just a people-first approach to business — it's a smart way to increase human intelligence across the whole enterprise.

If it sounds too good to be true, it can be difficult. It's a challenge to sustain it through the ups and downs of growth. And there is always a risk that promoting from within will dilute talent, in which the employee moving into the position vacated by the promoted employee would not be as experienced.

Yet, the practice works for many companies. How do they do this? In a landscape maintenance company, a crew leader can train their own replacement on the route they are working on. When the crew leader is promoted, the person moving up mentors the crew doing the same work on the same jobs as they were being trained on, giving them a better chance to be successful.

This same internal mobility concept can be applied to other field positions. But that is not enough. Helping individuals and teams at all levels, from the corner office to the back office, not only benefits the competency development pipeline but has great impact on the company as a whole.

Competency cultures can be transformative environments to work in. But to get to a working environment and mentoring culture that flows naturally and organically takes training. Not everyone comes to their job with the ability to help others increase their value. Training across the organization keeps everyone focused on the same outcomes and the same high standards of what's possible.

When there are mistakes along the way, there can be no blame. Implement investigative processes and systems that dig deep. One of the more effective techniques is asking "why?" three or more times to get to the root cause of the problem. Not doing this keeps you in a reactive mode jumping from one hot spot to another.

For a competency culture to work, it needs to be anchored by continuous learning. Structured education programs or ad hoc training through conferences and associations, and professional certification, are well worth the investment. Industry manufacturers and suppliers are a good source of technical and best practice training in advanced technologies, electric and autonomous equipment, irrigation, chemical application and fertilization.


When competency, performance improvement and continuous learning become the backbone of your organization, it becomes more than a competitive advantage. It becomes a lifecycle approach to how talent and performance is qualified and rewarded, how employees can excel and contribute to the overall success of their teams and your organization, and how smarter, trained employees can better identify potential risk, follow safety protocols and make better, informed decisions.

This not only benefits the customer who gains added value from a business that performs at the top of its collective ability, but services from a team of people who are empowered to perform at their very best. **L&L**



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## CREAM OF THE CROP

BY CHRIS DARNELL

SALES/MARKETING CONSULTANT

[chris@harvestlandscapeconsulting.com](mailto:chris@harvestlandscapeconsulting.com)

CREAM OF THE CROP features a rotating panel from the Harvest Group, a landscape business consulting company.

# INNOVATIVE SALES TECHNIQUES: A FRESH APPROACH FOR LANDSCAPERS

→ IN THE EVER-EVOLVING LANDSCAPE INDUSTRY, staying ahead of the competition requires more than just exceptional service and design creativity. It demands a strategic approach to sales that embraces both innovation and technology. As landscape professionals look to expand their client base and increase revenue, adopting modern sales techniques can make a significant difference. Here are key strategies that can transform your sales approach and drive your business forward.

**GET TECH-SAVVY WITH A PERSONAL TOUCH.** Incorporating technology into your sales process doesn't have to be impersonal or complicated. Simple tools like a basic CRM (Customer Relationship Management) system can help you keep track of your customers' preferences, past projects and future needs. Think of it as your digital notebook — helping you remember the little details that make your service feel special and tailored to each client.

**THE POWER OF VIRTUAL HANDSHAKES.** While there's no substitute for the personal touch of a face-to-face meeting, virtual consultations can be the next best thing. They're a sign that you value your clients' time and that you're flexible enough to meet them wherever they are, even if it's just on their lunch break at the office. This approach can extend your reach and offer a convenient option for those initial discussions or follow-up meetings.

**PERSONALIZED CUSTOMER EXPERIENCES.** In the landscape industry, personalization is key. Each client's needs and preferences are unique, and tailoring your sales pitch to address these specific requirements can significantly enhance your success rate. Use the information gathered from CRM systems, social media interactions and previous consultations to craft personalized proposals that resonate with your clients' visions. Demonstrating an understanding of their specific landscaping desires builds trust and confidence in your services.

**THE TRUST FACTOR: SHOW, DON'T TELL.** Nothing builds confidence in your services like seeing them in action. Share stories and testimonials from happy clients, along with before-and-after photos that showcase your team's transformations. Encourage your satisfied customers to share their experiences online and with friends. Word-of-mouth is golden in our business.

**FLEXIBILITY WINS: CUSTOM PRICING OPTIONS.** Not everyone's dream landscape comes with the same price tag. Offering a variety of pricing options, from basic upkeep to full-scale redesigns, allows your clients to choose what works best for their budget and backyard aspirations. And remember, a little flexibility can lead to a

long-term relationship and more business down the road.

**BE A GREEN THUMB GURU.** In the age of DIY, everyone loves to feel a bit more knowledgeable about their home projects. Share your expertise through tips on lawn care, seasonal planting guides or even quick how-to videos. This not only positions you as the local expert but also helps build a community of clients who trust your advice and appreciate the value you bring to their outdoor spaces.

Don't worry — the "Do It Yourselfers" will do it themselves whether you educate them or not, but the person that will hire someone will appreciate being informed and it will create trust that you are the authority.

**STRONG ROOTS THROUGH NETWORKING.** Never underestimate the power of a good old-fashioned handshake, whether it's at a local community event, a home show or a business meeting. Building relationships with other local businesses and professionals can open doors to new opportunities and referrals. It's all about supporting each other and growing together.

The landscape industry is highly competitive, but by embracing innovative sales techniques and leveraging technology, landscapers can differentiate themselves and achieve sustained growth. The modern landscaper's toolkit should include a mix of digital strategies, personalized service and flexible solutions that meet the evolving needs of today's clients.

By adopting these approaches, you can not only enhance your sales process but also create lasting relationships with your clients, paving the way for future success. **L&L**

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# "TALKING TO PEERS THAT FACE THE SAME OBSTACLES

and sharing and learning how we overcome them  
is a nice way to expand your horizons."

— JANET DENICOLA  
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## Rebbecca Laura

Account Manager,  
The Davey Tree Expert Company

*Rebbecca Laura is an active member of the National Association of Landscape Professionals Women in Landscape Network (powered by Envu) which provides a forum for industry professionals to support each other's professional growth. The Network is free to all industry professionals.*

**I HAVE BEEN WORKING** at The Davey Tree Expert Company for the past 19 years. My journey, which began as an office coordinator and led me to become an account manager, has been filled with learning, growth and stepping out of my comfort zone.

When I started with Davey, it was not a career choice; it was a job through a friend in a local office that needed administrative support. At this time in my life, I had not imagined where this new journey would take me.

As an office coordinator, I was the backbone of the office, ensuring smooth operations and providing support where needed. This role taught me the importance of organization, communication and teamwork in a professional setting.

Realizing I enjoyed talking with our customers and helping manage the crews, I knew I wanted to make this a career.

I had a keen eye for safety. This skill was noticed, and the responsibility of overseeing safety measures quickly became mine. This is a role I embraced wholeheartedly; I want everyone to go home the same way they came to work.

**WOMEN IN LANDSCAPING** is a column brought to you in partnership with the National Association of Landscape Professionals.

The path to success was not without its obstacles. As a woman in a predominantly male industry, I faced the challenge of being taken seriously, inside and outside of my organization.

I had to learn how to complete physical work typically associated with men, which required not only physical strength but also a deeper understanding of the industry.

To further my knowledge and skills, I completed extension courses and attended Davey's D.I.G.M. program. This program, designed to develop industry-specific management skills, was a turning point in my career. It not only equipped me with the necessary skills to excel in my role but also instilled a sense of confidence and self-belief.

Despite my accomplishments, I still sometimes face skepticism from clients due to my gender. To counter this, I have adopted a hands-on approach, often dressing for fieldwork and demonstrating my skills firsthand. Seeing me pull weeds or perform other tasks typically associated with the job has helped clients trust in my abilities more.

When meeting new potential clients, I sometimes bring another manager along. This strategy not only provides additional support but also helps to establish credibility and foster trust with the client.

One of the most significant steps in my journey was attending the Dale Carnegie leadership program. Taking on the challenge of speaking in front of an audience pushed me out of my comfort zone and taught me invaluable leadership skills. It was a transformative experience that shaped me into the leader I am today.

Throughout my career, I was fortunate to have a few individuals who believed in my potential and supported my growth. One piece of advice that resonated was, "If you're going to be noticed, be noticed for the right things." This counsel became a guiding principle, shaping my approach to my work and interactions with others.

My journey in the green industry has been a fulfilling one. It has taught me the importance of continuous learning, stepping out of one's comfort zone and the power of perseverance. As a woman in this industry, I hope my journey can inspire others to pursue their passions and never stop learning. **L&L**



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Dean DeSantis says the most important elements of starting a new branch are finding an ideal leadership team and making the new branch feel like a priority.



# OUT ON *new* LIMBS

IT'S A BIG DECISION WHEN COMPANIES LIKE DeSANTIS LANDSCAPES  
DECIDE TO EXPAND WITH BRANCH LOCATIONS.

STORY BY JIMMY MILLER / PHOTO BY BETTY BOYCE

*A*fter five years of 45-minute commutes, Dean DeSantis knew it was time for a new branch. DeSantis watched his crews wear themselves out driving from their home base in Salem, Oregon, to cover the Portland market. The question became, what's the difference between markets worth the longer commutes versus markets in need of another location?

For DeSantis Landscapes, which now has four offices in total, the answer is \$2 million in annual maintenance revenue.

"Do I feel I can get there?" DeSantis says. "I don't have to be there today. If I felt like that was possible, that was one of the benchmarks I used. For us, the Portland market was a big opportunity to move into, and so part of it is can we reduce mobilization... We realized the opportunity and expanded from there."



MARK CONKLIN, TEAMTURF

“IT’S ALL ABOUT PEOPLE.  
IN BUSINESS, IN EXPANSION,  
IN GROWTH — IT’S ABOUT THE “  
*people.*”

For another perspective, Mark Conklin sees it like this: Any company can just buy some new equipment and build another location on a plot of land. Expanding with new branches isn’t about any one thing — it’s about the people. Conklin co-founded TeamTurf in Pittsburgh 20 years ago; the company’s now at three different locations. The expansion started five years ago when TeamTurf acquired another local company.

Conklin admits he didn’t technically know his leadership was ready for the challenge, but he felt pretty confident in it. He also says he is always trying to improve on delegation, but once he got that down and felt he could trust his leaders to operate more independently, he was able to spend more time with all TeamTurf locations.

“It’s all about people,” he says. “In business, in expansion, in growth — it’s about the people.”

While people are the core of what drives successful branch expansion, there are more factors to consider as well. Determining when it’s a good time to expand is the first critical step in the process.

**HUMBLE BEGINNINGS.** Bryan Walters with Second to None Landscape + Tree Care says expansion came a little bit organically. Many of their commercial clients in Orlando asked for extra service with their other portfolio properties in Tampa, so they built a satellite branch there.

Now they’ve got three full-service branches and have created a triangle that offers coverage throughout a good portion of the state. The branches allow them to better mobilize assets to work on properties that are all within an hour of one of the three locations. Once they picked up about \$1 million in sales in each market, they hired an account manager.



Randy Hazer (left) and Mark Conklin run TeamTurf, which has now operated since 2006.

PHOTO COURTESY OF TEAMTURF





From left: Joey Harrison, VP Sales and Marketing; Dean DeSantis, President/Owner; Ken DeSantis, VP Administration; Bryan Gyllen, VP Operations/Partner

Their Fort Lauderdale branch has two managers, Tampa's got one and the main building has three.

Walters says it can be tricky determining when it's time to pounce on a new location, but he always justified it when they could reasonably estimate a half million dollars in revenue, which could support a four- or five-man mowing crew.

"It's all conducive to the size of the opportunities that you're coming across," Walters says. "Going into a new market, we jumped right out the gate in hiring a new crew."

While Walters admits he maybe took on a lot too quickly — their first location opened in 2019, and now they're up to three — other landscapers took their time. Ziehler Lawn Care in Centerville, Ohio, knew two years before expansion that change was coming. Andrew Ziehler, the company owner and CEO, says they had calculated their strong growth percentage to mean they'd need to expand their facility or move into a new market with a second location.

The decision went beyond just mathematics — Ziehler says one of the company's core values is to improve the lives of its employees. By offering them more opportunities to move into leadership roles, they'd have more chances to grow as individuals. Plus, Ziehler says he felt it was time to take the plunge — expansion was coming at some point, so why not then?

**"I PUT A LOT OF  
MILES ON MY  
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YOU'RE RELYING ON  
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TEAM BUT NEED TO  
HELP THEM ALONG."**

DEAN DESANTIS,  
DESANTIS LANDSCAPES





ANDREW ZIEHLER, ZIEHLER LAWN CARE IN CENTERVILLE, OHIO

“WE HAD TO GO OUT THERE  
AND TRY IT AND DO IT  
IF WE HAD A CHANCE TO  
BUILD UPON OUR LONG-TERM  
*goals.*”

“At some point, we had to pull the band-aid off,” Ziehler says. “We had to go out there and try it and do it if we had a chance to build upon our long-term goals.”

**(RE)SETTING THE STANDARD.** Ziehler says his employees were energized by the decision to expand — everyone likes to be a part of a winning team, he says. But expansion also brings several considerations. How will a new location uphold the same service quality clients have experienced from a company with just one branch? And how will the company’s culture translate into new service areas?

Ziehler says it’s normal for each branch to have its own subculture, but propping up core values that cannot change is important. For example, Ziehler cites his company’s brand promise to the customer — deliver unmatched customer experience. “That will never change, no matter

how many branches we have,” he says. “Because those things are integral foundational pieces of the business. They can’t change just by adding another branch.”

Walters agrees, though he adds that “it’s definitely not easy.”

“If anyone tells you otherwise,” he laughs, “they’re probably lying.”

Maintaining quality control comes down to implementing good training practices as the company expands. Walters says he safeguards against a slip in quality by ensuring he has the right people in place to oversee the business. “That’s the saving grace for ensuring quality,” he says.

And even then, he wasn’t off the hook — he says he had to work some extra hours and stayed heavily involved as the branch opened up. Today, he still splits up some of his time visiting each individual branch. That’s an important consideration for business owners considering expansion — what’s their bandwidth for longer commutes?

**Above:** Ziehler Lawn Care believes branch expansion can empower employees to take on new roles.





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## COVER STORY



Second to None Landscape + Tree Care's Bryan Walters navigated the challenge of continuing company culture at their Sanford location.

"I put a lot of miles on my vehicle," DeSantis says. "That's really it. I've got a great team, so it's not just me. You're relying on your leadership team but need to help them along."

DeSantis adds that different locations have differing labor markets, and while it's tight across the industry, he will often evaluate how potential competitors are doing in hiring in those spots. If they're constantly putting out ads looking for work, it's possible the labor market there will be dry.

"Labor-wise, if you can have one of your current employees move out to this new branch, that's ideal," he says. "(Maybe it's) 30 minutes this way, 30 minutes that way. It can create some continuity."

Conklin says when he expanded to another branch, he hired someone who already understood Conklin's mindset and what Conklin wanted out of a new branch. He found an "outstanding team builder" who had past industry experience.

"I brought somebody in with similar values to what we have in our company, the same type of culture that we have, which made it a little easier," he says.

**BE A PEOPLE PERSON.** When Conklin expanded via an acquisition, he maintained a close relationship with the seller and retained a few of the employees. Four years later, they still have a good relationship, in large part because Conklin says he found someone who believed in his own vision before buying him out.

"We have a good relationship. He also helps with anything we need," Conklin says. "I think finding someone you're going to buy out who fits what you do is key."

But even through expansion without M&A activity, Conklin says it's important to get to know your people.

"I know all my guys," he says. "We have around 40 now, and I know them all. As the owner, I try to make that a point to know



BRYAN WALTERS,  
SECOND TO NONE LANDSCAPE + TREE CARE

CALCULATE YOUR COSTS OR  
YOUR RISKS BUT DON'T BE  
AFRAID TO JUMP INTO A NEW  
*opportunity.*"

all my people and have a good relationship with them. That's what helps retain the employees."

Ziehler says his leaders at different branches will help one another out, which shows buy-in from the leadership that trickles down to all ranks at the company. He says his Dayton branch manager and two service leaders will go help out at the Cincinnati branch if there's an influx in service calls or if someone calls off.

Taking the time to set that standard is important, especially because new locations will hire lots of new employees who are unfamiliar with the company and even the green industry. Ziehler says it's a company core value to "do whatever it takes," and his leadership lives it out.

"At a real high level, it's that we're unwavering on those foundational pieces," he says. "Everybody knows what they are."

DeSantis reiterates the importance of finding the right staffing. Identifying a branch leader who's relatively independent, driven and trustworthy is key, especially because they'll seem like they're on an island a lot as they're getting going. He recommends creating the least resistance possible for new branches — buy them newer equipment and newer vehicles because hiring a full-time mechanic there may be tricky. Spend time at those branches and build relationships with the employees, too, he says.

"A lot of times, they'll feel like they don't have the same resources and the same attention that your largest branches have," DeSantis says. "You want to stroke things a little bit."

So, there's a lot to consider. All four landscapers admit that, and Walters adds that if he had to do it all over again, he'd probably slow down the process a bit. But in the end, he also urges landscapers to make educated risks and go for it.

"Calculate your costs or your risks but don't be afraid to jump into a new opportunity," he says. "You could be missing an opportunity someone else will get. If you want to grow and you want to expand, just do it. Go for it when the opportunity presents itself." **L&L**

The author is an associate editor with Lawn & Landscape magazine.



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The inaugural Lawn & Landscape Business Builders event will feature education and networking for landscapers who want to aggressively grow their companies.

By Brian Horn

# Higher expectations

**T**he industry is growing at a rapid rate, and maybe as fast as ever. While there is heavy interest from private equity firms investing in the industry fueling mergers and acquisitions activity, some landscapers are also growing organically without that backing.

The **Lawn & Landscape Business Builders Summit** will cover both avenues to growth and everything in between. Here's a preview of the five panels that will take place May 22-23 in Nashville.

Visit [www.llbusinessbuilderssummit.com](http://www.llbusinessbuilderssummit.com) to learn more about the event.

**GETTING READY TO SELL.** Selling the business can be a sensitive subject for some company owners. But that may be the decision an owner makes down the line, and now is as good as time as any to start planning.

"Landscaping is a labor-driven business, and a buyer is really focused on buying two things: employees and customers," says Tom Heaviland, CEO of Verde Property Services in California. Heaviland sold his company, Heaviland Enterprises, to BrightView in 2019 and stayed on for a bit working in the company's M&A department.

Preparing your company for a deal is a detailed process.

"Don't be misled; selling your company takes a great deal of effort," Heaviland says. "A lot of hard work on both the seller and buyer side goes into getting the deal across the finish line. From an Indication of Interest, to a Letter of Intent, to data upload and due

diligence, to signing of documents, there are a lot of layers and steps needed to get to a final close date."

Heaviland says the sooner you start preparing, the better.

"Focus on retention and tenure by providing above market compensation and benefits packages, practicing open book management and building a culture of collaboration and teamwork," he says. "I don't know about you, but that sounds like a great company to buy."

**CULTURE COMPONENT.** It's hard enough to develop and maintain a culture and identity in a slow-growing company. But throw in the chaos that comes with rapid growth, and you have to work that much harder to maintain the culture of your organization.

The first-ever Lawn & Landscape Business Builders Summit will be taking over Nashville May 22-23.



Brad Stephenson, CEO of New Castle Lawn & Landscape in Pennsylvania, says a key to keeping your established culture from eroding as you grow, is using the company's core values when hiring. New Castle grew 65% from 2018 to 2021, and he says culture has been a main reason for that success.

"Our new hires need to Care, they need to want to Improve along with having a good Attitude," he says. "We call this CIA. One bad person could bring the entire ship down."

**BRANCHING OUT.** With revenue growth comes the possibilities of opening new locations. Sullivan Landscaping in Delaware has three branches and the company's vice president, Joel Sullivan, says you need to have a good grasp of your numbers if you are considering a new location. Sullivan won a large contract to help with the opening of his first location, and if they hadn't, things could have gotten messy.

"Although luck was on our side, what we wish we knew is that we should never start a new branch with less than \$1 million in annual revenue and then scale it up to \$3 million as quickly as possible," Joel Sullivan says. "We were fortunate that this particular contract amount was substantial enough to get things moving."

Because Sullivan was starting from scratch with the new branch, he also underestimated the work it would take to become functional. There was no electricity, no gas tanks, no fence around the yard, no crew members, no ... you get the point.

"We spent the first year becoming fully functional, although we operated from the first day as if we were," he says. "We were so excited, so full of optimism, so full of confidence that we didn't realize the immense undertaking that opening a branch from a piece of farmland would be."

**PRIVATE EQUITY 101.** Investors from outside of the industry continue to show strong interest in landscaping. Bob Grover, CEO of Pacific Landscape Management in Oregon, sold to a private equity firm in 2021. He says that while the firm's goal is to increase the value of the company, they are also there to support the company.

"They have helped us and encouraged us to develop a more sophisticated back

are hard to accept, but all of them are well meaning to help our business expand and improve. But sometimes the truth is hard to hear."

**THE ORGANIC ROUTE.** Some companies like to focus on good ol' fashioned organic growth. That can prove challenging, but one way to get more customers is by marketing, which has worked for Marcus Celiano, president and CEO of Golden Wolf Landscape & Design in New Jersey.

"Myself, along with the marketing team, were able to develop a system to reverse-engineer our marketing plan based off our KPI's we track," Celiano says. "By that, I mean you can confidently plan to achieve X in revenue if you spend Y in marketing

## **"LANDSCAPING IS A LABOR-DRIVEN BUSINESS, AND A BUYER IS REALLY FOCUSED ON BUYING TWO THINGS: EMPLOYEES AND CUSTOMERS."**

**—Tom Heaviland, CEO, Verde Property Services**

office sales system and fleet management," Grover says. "They are helping us grow up as a professional business beyond our landscape service."

If your business is strong enough to have interest from private equity firm, there is a good chance that the leader is very strong-willed and will have the final say on decisions. But that changes when selling.

"We all love advice and get it from each other, but when you take on a partner, their opinion carries more weight than the opinion of a peer or consultant," Grover says.

"All have vast experience working with entrepreneurial businesses, and us strong-willed entrepreneurs need to open ourselves up to feedback and challenge of our partner. Sometimes these challenges

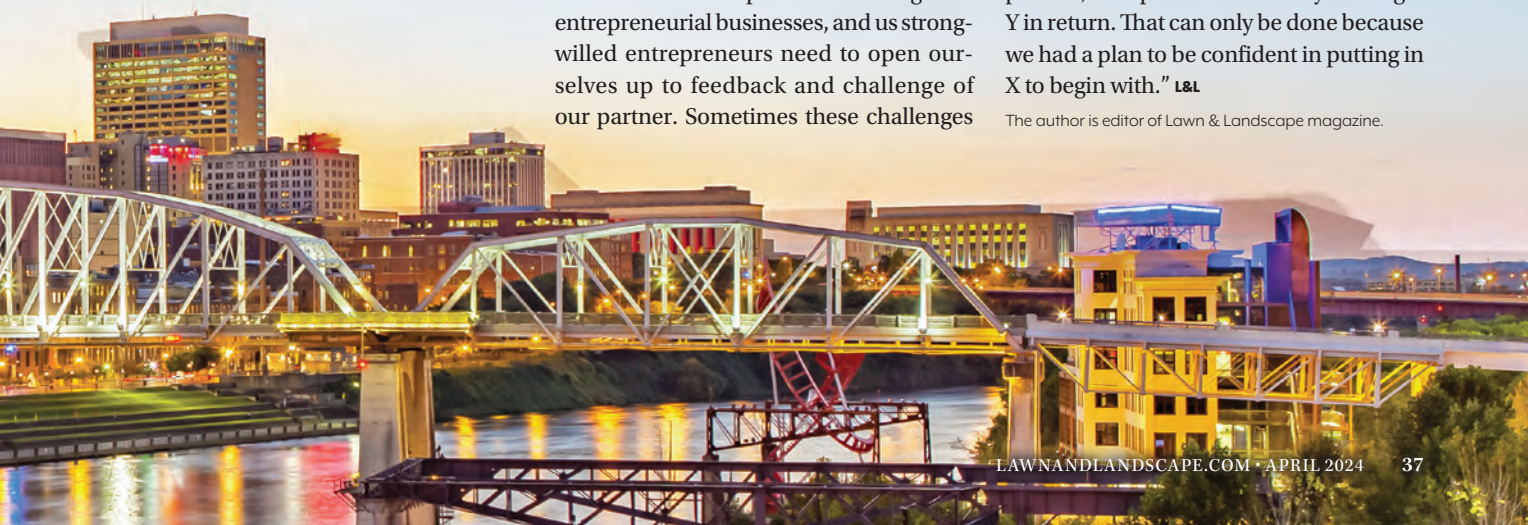
because you know your cost per lead, closing percentage and average ticket per service/division."

Celiano was able to figure the formula out early in the business' existence.

"A lot of companies look at marketing as an expense, which it is, don't get me wrong, you do have to pay for it, but being able to leverage that expense to confidently generate an ROI is one of the things that I did to help with growth," he says.

"I look at marketing and the corresponding KPI's as a slot machine," he adds. "You put X in, then pull the lever and you will get Y in return. That can only be done because we had a plan to be confident in putting in X to begin with." **L&L**

The author is editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.



# RECOGNITION & RECRUITMENT

By Gregg Wartgow



Pro Turf & Pro Pest Solutions implemented key employee initiatives that helped support consecutive years of double-digit growth.

**W**hen you're growing sales by nearly \$1 million a year, you better have a steady supply of great employees and even better leaders.

For Pro Turf & Pro Pest Solutions, thinking outside the box has helped secure an ample amount of both.

"The biggest challenge is getting people to see the opportunities you can offer and how they can build a great career in this industry," says Scott Doss, co-founder and president of Pro Turf & Pro Pest Solutions, which operates three branches in Kansas City, Mo., St. Louis and Omaha, Neb. "Having the ability to grow our company while helping our employees grow professionally is what continues to drive me every day."

In hopes of improving its ability to recruit, retain and grow their employees, Pro Turf & Pro Pest has launched three new initiatives over the past couple of years. The results have surpassed expectations, which is welcome news given the torrid growth spurt the company has been on.

Pro Turf & Pro Pest has grown more than 40% since 2020. The company now employs roughly 75 people who help generate more than \$11 million in annual revenue, two-thirds of which is on the turf side. Now, having recently been acquired by Senske Services, Pro Turf & Pro Pest is poised to add Midwest lawn and pest control markets.

"My wife, Staci, and I liked the idea of selling our company to private equity because it would provide the resources we needed to accelerate our growth," Scott says, adding that Senske Services is backed by private equity firm GTCR. "We've been growing a lot in recent years but getting to the next level is difficult. We want to grow even faster be-

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**Scott Doss**, company co-founder, is staying on as president now that Pro Turf & Pro Pest Solutions has been acquired by Senske Services.



cause we have so many talented employees we want to create opportunities for.

"So we had a choice to make," he adds. "We could continue doing what we'd been doing or find somebody to partner with who could help us grow organically and through acquisitions. That's what we've done, and we're really excited."

#### **RECRUITING THE BEST AND MAKING THEM EVEN BETTER.**

Scott says several of his key managers have been with Pro Turf & Pro Pest for 15-plus years. Many started out as technicians or customer service reps. They all shared two key traits when Scott first hired them: drive and dependability. Scott says these are essential qualities a new hire must always possess, even in today's difficult labor market.

One of the most surefire ways to ensure "drive and dependability" is to hire people who share a connection to your existing employees. Pro Turf & Pro Pest started a referral program a few years ago. Scott's son, Jordan, has helped lead that effort.

"We've structured the program so an employee can earn up to \$1,200 (paid out incrementally) after their referral has been with our company for six months," says Jordan, who serves as a marketing and recruiting specialist at Pro Turf & Pro Pest. "This program has resulted in a lot of families and generations working here, which has also had a positive impact on retention."

Jordan says some of the specifics of the employee referral program may be tweaked now that Pro Turf & Pro Pest is part of the Senske Services family of companies. Senske has a referral program, too, and Pro Turf & Pro Pest wants to make sure its program is in alignment.

Another program started over the past couple of years is the senior tech program. Some of the company's more experienced technicians are responsible for four or five techs who aren't so experienced. The senior techs are responsible for each technician's initial training, as well as ongoing trainings and weekly meetings. In essence, it's a mentoring program that helps ensure new hires are brought up the right way. There's

supervisory levels. There are three ways employees can earn Pro Points, and those points can then be cashed in for things like Amazon gift cards, tickets to sporting events and company swag.

The first way to earn Pro Points is to have your name mentioned in a five-star Google review. Since starting this program two years ago, Jordan says most of the company's reviews now receive five stars. Prior to Pro Points, the company's Google rating was a little over three. Jordan attributes the improvement to the fact that employees have been consistently encouraging customers to provide a review.

A second way to earn Pro Points is by being nominated by a coworker for go-

*"This program has resulted in a lot of families and generations working here, which has also had a positive impact on retention."*

**Jordan Doss, marketing and recruiting specialist, Pro Turf & Pro Pest**

also a side benefit. "This program is proving to be an effective way of showing employees what it takes to be a manager and take on more responsibilities," Scott says.

**REWARDS AND RECOGNITION.** Another relatively new initiative is Pro Points. It's a recognition and rewards program for all employees below the management and

ing above and beyond the call of duty. "It doesn't have to be a manager, either," Jordan says. This element of the program is essential because it provides a better opportunity for office staff who aren't in the field interfacing with customers. A group of four or five non-management employees is elected to go through the nominations each month and award points.



**Pro Turf and Pro Pest has** three branches and roughly 75 employees.

## KEEPING AN EYE ON IDLE TIME

### THE DAYS OF LAWN CARE COMPANIES

selling their way out of mistakes are over. “You have to become more efficient these days, and that requires better management,” says Scott Doss, co-founder and president of Pro Turf & Pro Pest Solutions based in Kansas City, Mo.

One area where Pro Turf & Pro Pest has had some success is vehicle idling. The company started using GPS vehicle tracking devices a couple years ago. Doss was initially looking to gain insights into routing efficiency and fuel consumption. He discovered that vehicle idling was an equally important issue to look into.

“We found that a lot of technicians were just leaving the truck run while they treated a property,” Doss says. “They thought they were doing the right thing from an efficiency standpoint, but that was having a negative effect on fuel consumption.”

Pro Turf & Pro Pest’s vehicle tracking system sends alerts to both the technician and management anytime a vehicle is left idling for more than four minutes. These automated alerts helped change driver behavior quickly, which had an immediate impact on fuel consumption. In fact, company sales increased by \$1 million from 2021 to 2022, but fuel consumption dropped by roughly 9,000 gallons.

Now two years into the program, idle time has become top of mind for everybody. Blake Hooten, IT manager, helps get the tracking device data onto a company database server, and then into an easily reviewable Google Sheets document. Large-screen TVs display the “idle time scoreboards” on an ongoing basis in meeting rooms. “The data is pulled every five minutes, so you can literally watch idle time in real time throughout the day,” Hooten says.

“With those scoreboards, everyone can see how many stops each technician had and what their idle times were,” adds Jarid Wise, chief operations officer. “This effort has self-created a friendly competition between techs, each striving to have the least amount of idle time and save the most fuel.”

Some companies worry that vehicle tracking devices will rub employees the wrong way. Pro Turf & Pro Pest did experience some of that early on. But at the end of the day, vehicle tracking has just made employees more aware. “People respect what you inspect,” Doss says.



**Scott's son, Jordan (left), and wife, Staci,** have been instrumental in developing several key initiatives over the past couple of years to help improve employee recruiting, retention and development.

“Our people really like this aspect of the program because it’s more democratic and they feel like the non-management employees really control it,” Jordan says.

“And for those four or five individuals who are elected to the review board, this also gives them some additional responsibility and a sense of pride in the difference they’re making,” Scott adds.

One other way to earn Pro Points is through departmental competition. An obvious example is a sales contest within the sales department. But other contests are also developed in other areas of the company.

“We recently had a ‘cancel save contest’ where our customer service representatives competed to see who could prevent the most customers from cancelling their service,” Jordan says. “Effective tactics included adjusting the customer’s program or payment plan.”

It took a little while for the Pro Points program to gain traction with employees. “But once people caught on to how it would work and benefit them, it took off like wildfire,” says Staci Doss, co-founder and HR manager.

While the reward is definitely appreciated, it’s the recognition that employees seem to value the most — particularly the process of nominating fellow coworkers. “We’ve seen that lifting others up is even more important than getting nominated yourself,” Staci says. “From that perspective alone, the program has really been tremendous.”

Needless to say, this is one of those creative ideas that Scott, Staci and the rest of the management team plan to stick with. “We are continuing this program in 2024, though it may evolve in different ways,” Staci points out, adding that Senske Services offers some recognition programs as well.

“We’re already finding that out as we integrate with the Senske family of companies,” Scott adds. “The sharing of ideas is something I’m really looking forward to over the next four to six years. That kind of thing was very important to me and Staci as we determined the best way to go about selling our company. We wanted to find a partner that would recognize what we bring to the table.” **L&L**

The author is a freelance writer based in Wisconsin.



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**LAWN CARE OPERATORS CAN EXPECT THE  
SAME COMMON OCCURRENCES WHEN IT COMES TO WEEDS  
AND PESTS THIS SPRING SEASON.**

Crabgrass

Clover

Dollar Spot

Henbit

*WHAT'S  
SPRINGING  
UP?*

By Kim Lux

Harry Bittercress

Dandelion

Redthread

Moss

**S**pring is here. Birds are chirping. The weather is warming up. And the grass is getting greener — literally.

That means lawn care operators are busy gearing up for another grueling season of combatting common weeds, pests and diseases creeping up in their customers' turf while also managing those customers' expectations accordingly.

According to some LCOs and turfgrass specialists, contractors can expect business as usual around the country this spring in terms of spring weeds and pests.

"Usually, crabgrass and other annual grassy weeds are basically what lawn care operators deal with when they go out for round one and are making their fertilizer and herbicide applications," says David



Gardner, professor of turfgrass science at The Ohio State University. "Typically, it's in April, but sometimes it can be March depending on what part of the country you're in."

In Pennsylvania, Tim Sheppard, owner of Soil Shepherds, says his team is ready to hit the ground running. They're expecting to be dealing with such things as hairy bittercress, red dead nettle, creeping Charlie, common chickweed and common groundsel.

"We're ready to go," Sheppard says. "It's all about the soil temperatures reaching that 40-45 degree mark, which traditionally happens around the first or second week of March."

Andrew Iverstine, owner of the South Carolina-based Iverstine Outdoors, says the weeds most common for his crews to combat are also crabgrass, nutsedge, poa annua, poa trivialis, dallis grass and doveweed.

And some of these are becoming worse problems each and every year.

"We used to have 10% of yards we treat that had poa annua and poa trivialis," Iverstine says. "But it's almost 50% now."

That's true out west too, where Dr. Alec Kowalewski, associate professor at Oregon State University, says crabgrass is continuing to be a problem.

"We have a lot more crabgrass in the Pacific Northwest than we've had in the past," he says. "It's reached a point now where it's gone from being a new weed to a common spring weed. I think a lot of people are going to be a little surprised by it and have trouble identifying it this season."

But crabgrass isn't the only weed prevalent in the Pacific Northwest.

"We always battle with moss coming out of the winter and another common weed for us is false dandelions — it's probably our most common broadleaf weed," Kowalewski says.

Gardner adds that across the country, but especially in the Northeast, more mild winters with above average temperatures can also contribute to more weeds come springtime.

"The winters have been more pleasant and not quite as cold or snowy, so it's also a more hospitable environment for the

## "The main method of building healthy soil is really a quality compost."

— TIM SHEPPARD, OWNER OF SOIL SHEPHERDS

winter annual broadleaf weeds," he says. "These are weeds that germinate in the fall, persist vegetatively over the winter and then they grow very fast, flower and set seed in the spring."

Gardner says this is especially true of weeds like henbit, chickweed and hairy bittercress.

**PERSISTENT PESTS.** In terms of pests, Gardner says to expect white grub to be a problem this spring.

"The one insect or pest that people pay the most attention to are white grubs," he notes. "That application typically doesn't go down until July. The products we apply, they don't persist for that long and so if you apply them too early, there's a chance there won't be a sufficient amount of it left when the insects is actually a problem."

Kowalewski says that as pesticide regulations expand up north in Canada, the Pacific Northwest will continue to see more insects traveling their way.

"We are seeing more billbugs in the Pacific Northwest," he says. "They're migrating slowly over time. A lot of insects are coming down from British Columbia because you cannot apply pesticides to turf grass in BC anymore. Every year we see a little bit more."

But when it comes to treating lawns for these creatures, Sheppard and Iverstine are in agreement that the only pest control done is what's best for the plant.

"That's not nature — nature has insects," Iverstine. "We only do pest control if it's for the purpose of the plant."

Sheppard adds that because he offers regenerative landscaping through sustain-

able practices, most of his clients are calling him because they want more pests, not less.

"In terms of pests, there's nothing I'm doing in terms of treating chemically," he says. "It's funny — my customers actually pay me to have pests come to their property...The common example is milkweed that brings on Monarch butterflies and tons of others. That's what my customers want."

**PREVENTATIVE MEASURES.** Whether it's weeds or pests that have your customers calling, Kowalewski says spring is the perfect time to be selling lawn care and pest packages.

"I think it's a fantastic time," he says. "In the Northwest, grass starts to grow really hard and people really start to think about their lawns. It's a great time for preemergent herbicide applications and fertilizer applications. So, it's a good time to start marketing service."

He adds those pre-emergent herbicides are great for the crabgrass and moss growing up in the Pacific Northwest.

"A lot of times we will tell people to spray the moss with an iron-based product or a fatty acid soap-based product and then dethatch the moss out," he says. "When we have thin areas of turf that will get crabgrass in the summer, we will suggest a preemergence herbicide application and fertilization to make the grass dense and prevent the crabgrass from coming in."

Iverstine agrees that now's the time to be pounding the pavement in terms of lawn care customers.

"For us, it's early spring and late summer that we get the most calls," Iverstine says.

He adds that the biggest influx of custom-

ers comes between February 15 and Easter. Iverstine says that customers who call later in the season are troublesome simply just because the treatment takes more time and supplies.

Sheppard says the lawns he treats tend to green up faster in the spring than his competitors.

“My lawns start to green up in March, whereas anybody using the traditional model, their lawn won’t green up until that first treatment is done, which is typically closer to April,” he says.

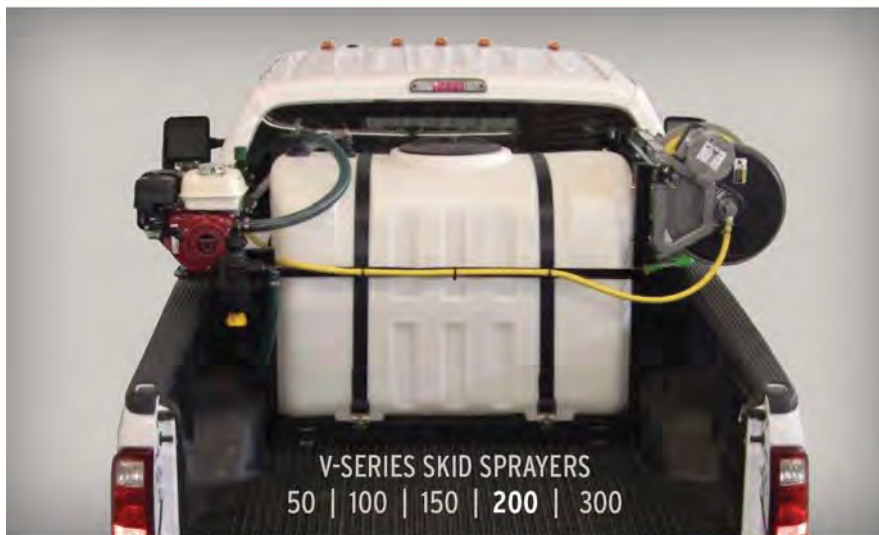
Sheppard adds this is due in large part to building healthy soil for his customers.

“The main method of building healthy



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soil is really a quality compost, he says. “I’m fortunate that where I live in Kennett Square, it’s the mushroom capital of the world. So, there’s a place that takes the mushroom soil and add in a lot of greens and they make an organic compost that I can buy in bulk and use that as a top dressing both on lawns and in the landscape.

“It’s about preventing the weed seeds from germinating versus dealing with them post-germination,” Sheppard adds. “A lot of that comes down to promoting healthy soil. It’s not about killing the weed — so if somebody has crabgrass growing, what do you do? You can come in and spray it, but I’m not just trying to kill it. I’ll put down extra compost in those areas, and by balancing the soil, it won’t germinate.”

And while the spring will be a busy time of year for LCOs, Gardner says true weed control should start in the fall.

“The best course of action is to attempt to control them in the fall after they’ve germinated and are still really tiny,” he says. “Fall applications can control those.”

**PERCEPTION IS KEY.** But even with proper care, Iverstine and Sheppard say the true challenge in lawn care comes to effectively educating their client.

“For us, the hardest thing to educate customers on is that in lawn care, you’re solving your problems four months before they happen,” Iverstine says. “That’s how you properly manage lawns. You’re treating them before the problems happen. But your customers, and influx of sales opportunities, show up when the problem is there.”

Iverstine adds that this comes down to being prompt and proactive with communication rather than reactive.

“It’s more about communication than education,” he says. “My customers are much more receptive to those things that



are difficult or out of our control if I'm telling them about the problem before they see the problem. It's harder to educate somebody afterwards when they're blaming you for their expectations."

Sheppard says the best way to show off his regenerative approach to lawn care is online, where current and prospective customers can learn more about his method.

He adds that just throwing facts at them in person can be overwhelming and doesn't really let the value sink in. The Soil Shepherds YouTube Channel alone has over 1,000 followers and 37 informative videos.

"There's 1 billion living organisms in a teaspoon of soil — it's such a staggering number that people don't believe it," he says. "That's where I started making the YouTube videos." **L&L**

The author is associate editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.



Soil Shepherds uses YouTube and social media to educate clients on weed control.

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Right: McHale's lawn care, turf and detail crews continue to maintain the property and its ecosystem of plants.



Above inset: In addition to a guest house, the property now boasts an elaborate garden and functioning greenhouse.





# GARDEN *of* EDEN

*McHale Landscape Design  
turned their client's  
neighboring property into a  
fully functional garden oasis.*

**I**n McLean, Virginia, when a client purchased the adjacent property to their home in hopes of turning it into a guest house and a dream kitchen garden, complete with a full greenhouse, McHale Landscape Design got to work on the one-of-a-kind fruit and vegetable producing outdoor living space constructed within a natural residential landscape.

McHale Landscape Design designed and constructed the infrastructure, masonry work, carpentry and landscape planting. Crews worked as a team to construct this unique garden space. Every detail was carefully crafted. Hand-chiseled stone, solid cedar fencing, precision craftsmanship and careful attention to plant selections make this a beautiful and luxurious outdoor space.

Over the course of the project, McHale's crews ran into a few challenges, including severe grade changes that required terracing walls and a well-functioning drainage infrastructure. There was also heavy clay soil that required thorough soil analysis and amending. Setbacks and HOA restrictions were obstacles the team problem solved as well.

Once the project was completed by the collaborative effort of the design team, masons, carpenters and landscape technicians, the company's maintenance team was asked to maintain this functional, harvestable and colorful garden. McHale's turf care, lawn care and detail crews work as a team to maintain this unique garden. Varied watering requirements are met by regularly updating the irrigation schedule after every site visit. Specialized fertilization, pest and disease control methods for produce are also required.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF MCHALE LANDSCAPE DESIGN





# ROLLING F

The green industry supply chain tackles challenges that could affect the availability and quality of the products landscapers purchase.

**By Douglas J. Guth**

**H**orticulture is demanding logistically compared to other types of freight, as hauling plants or supplies is different from moving a load of dish soap or t-shirts. Industry onlookers note that multi-stop routes and special handling requirements present unique challenges alongside broader concerns like finding qualified drivers.

“We ship live, perishable products, and the time they can spend in the box is finite,” says Catherine Blaney, operations manager for Ball Horticultural Company’s vegetative breeding partners Darwin Perennials, Ball FloraPlant and Selecta One. “A cancelled flight or failure at the FedEx Memphis hub impacts our product more than a box of Kleenex sitting there because our product has living, breathing tissue.”





# WITH THE LOW

The singular nature of agricultural goods is only one challenge companies face as the new growing season kicks off. Hurdles like crop seasonality, coupled with labor shortages and an ever-changing regulatory landscape, have behind-the-scenes personnel working to ensure crops reach their destinations efficiently and in optimal condition.

For Ball Horticultural, this effort begins at the production level. Plants are harvested at peak carbohydrate load to keep them in top condition throughout transportation. Blaney says even a single flipped box can mean a scattered mess of tissue culture, plugs or liners, costing customers money and time.

AmericanHort's clients encompass growers, retailers, breeders and suppliers, with greenhouse and nursery crops comprising about one-third of its specialty crop business. Green industry businesses are pondering transportation methods including trucking, rail and waterways, says Matt Mika, AmericanHort vice president of advocacy and government affairs.

The trucking industry in particular has been slowed by a rash of retirements as well as evolving driver requirements. Current shipping demand calls for an immediate influx of about 60,000 drivers, a deficit expected to balloon to more than 160,000 by 2028, says Mika.



Shipping plants has its own set of unique challenges. These include multi-stop routes, special handling requirements, USDA inspections and the perishable nature of the product itself.

A shorthanded market prior to the COVID-19 pandemic was further harmed when shuttered training schools dried up the fragile pipeline of drivers. More drivers in the green industry will help buoy the entire supply chain, Mika adds.

"During COVID, we could not move perishable goods, but these items have a shelf life and can't sit on a truck for months at a time," he says. "It's not like a box from Amazon that can be put into a corner."

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— KEN ADAMO, CHIEF OF ANALYTICS AT DAT FREIGHT & ANALYTICS

**TRUCKING IS STILL THE BEST OPTION.** AmericanHort supports a pair of legislative proposals that could alleviate the commercial truck driver shortage. The DRIVE Safe Integrity Act, introduced by Representatives Rick Crawford (R-AZ) and Henry Cuellar (D-TX), would remove the regulatory burdens that prevent drivers ages 18-20 from participating in interstate trucking. Another bill, the Truck Parking Improvement Act, would provide grants to build or improve public parking facilities for trucks and additional commercial motor vehicles.

The bipartisan DRIVE bill aims to reenact an apprenticeship program to bring thousands of young drivers into the sector. Tapping ex-military personnel with experience piloting tanks and heavy trucks is another way of resolving agriculture's trucking shortfall, says Colin Jones, president of Manor View Farm, a Maryland landscape distribution center and AmericanHort member.

The abundance of trucking companies should reduce stress for ag officials looking for a driver, says Ken Adamo, chief of analytics at DAT Freight & Analytics, an Akron-based truckload freight enterprise.

Yet, numerous fleets raised pay post-pandemic to attract talent, while adjusting job requirements so employees can focus on driving rather than handling freight. "Basic respect" is another key facet in drawing workers into a demanding industry, Adamo says.

"Make sure your work area is safe, that you have helpers on site, and that the han-





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dling equipment works,” he says. “Stick to your loading and delivery schedules, too. Most over-the-road drivers get paid by the mile yet are limited in the number of hours they can work. Delays that reduce the distance drivers can travel before their on-duty clock runs out will literally take money out of their pocket.”

While plant delivery is not limited to trucking, the sector still remains horticulture’s best option in hauling delicate cargo, says Jones of Manor View.

Long stretches of hot, dry weather in 2023 left the Mississippi River so low that barge companies were forced to reduce their loads of corn and soybeans. Meanwhile,

rail transport is less efficient and predictable than on-the-road transport, he adds.

“We do two loads of rail annually, but it doesn’t always work for our needs because we’ve got so much material that has to get to a landscaper or garden center,” Jones says. “If (a train) gets stuck in a Montana snowstorm, it’s not like a truck that can make its way out. Rail is cheaper, but it’s less reliable.”

International and commercial airlift into the U.S. and Canada has encountered labor challenges, resulting in offloads for certain supply routes, says Derrick Nagle, international logistics manager at Ball Horticultural.

“We want to produce the freshest possible cuttings, so we are harvesting based on the cut-off time at the airport,” Nagle says. “And we are seeing fluctuations and changes to flight schedules that have been consistent for years. That’s disrupted the time in the box and impacted our customers.”

**ROLLING WITH THE CHANGES.** Fuel is a truck fleet’s biggest expense outside of labor, with surcharges protecting the marketplace against price fluctuations. The fuel surcharge increased during COVID, topping out at 62 cents per mile in 2022 before levelling off. Decreasing gas costs offer a friendlier forecast for ag businesses gearing up for spring, says Adamo, the DAT official.

“Fuel prices are now below \$4 a gallon as a national average,” Adamo says. “That’s good news for everyone concerned about transportation costs.”

New and existing regulations are having an impact on product transportation in the early days of 2024, says Blaney, the Ball Horticultural affiliates manager. For instance, mandatory USDA inspection of unrooted geranium material for *Ralstonia* has resulted in minimum one-day delays for every shipment tested.

“Geraniums do not do well with shipment delays,” Blaney says. “This is an area our industry needs to continue to collaborate with the USDA on for the 2024-25 season.”

Ball Horticultural partners with USDA and its Canadian equivalent to safeguard shipments from pests and pathogens. The



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company also tracks extreme fluctuations in weather — recent subzero temperatures in the U.S. caused service failures for UPS and FedEx.

“I would not say this year is worse than others, but when you are in the heat of shipping, it certainly can feel like it,” Blaney says. “Truck deliveries for international

shipments of cuttings, as well as local regional trucking programs of plugs and liners, can mitigate these circumstances.”

Pest regulatory compliance is becoming more complicated as growers specialize and buy from each other, which necessitates tracking of plant origin and health throughout the market chain. Many mate-

**“IF YOU HAVE SPACE TO HOLD PRODUCTS, THAT’S GREAT, BUT THIS IS A JUST-IN-TIME INDUSTRY, SO THE AMOUNT OF PLANT MATERIAL WE CAN TURN OVER IS BETTER.”**

— COLIN JONES, PRESIDENT  
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rial transactions are handled by brokers and additional third parties, which only increases risk and complication.

Ultimately, agriculture’s unique characteristics should motivate industry officials to purchase products ahead of time, says Manor View’s Jones.

“If you have space to hold products, that’s great, but this is a just-in-time industry, so the amount of plant material we can turn over is better,” Jones says. “That’s a fresher product and a better success rate after its planted. Less water, fertilizer and care is better for the end user.”

Buying earlier will help farms and greenhouses plan their labor and stock, although it won’t do much to offset a shipping delay, says Marcin Czaicki, a logistics manager at Ball Horticultural.

Staying nimble is more crucial in a time-intensive industry, Czaicki says. Meticulously planned back-ups and contingencies will ideally protect farmers from acts of man and God alike.

“Businesses must be flexible in terms of delivery requirements and the kind of crops they’re buying for the season,” Czaicki says. “Stick with the varieties you know, but if we can’t supply that particular color, be flexible on what you can grow.” **L&L**

Douglas J. Guth is a freelance journalist based in Ohio.





# Ask The Expert

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## ASK THE EXPERT

Q + A

with  
**Grant Wilson***Director, Commercial Product Engineering,  
AriensCo.*

day. Second, should be a focus on making sure the mower is the “right tool” needed to complete the job. Is the cut quality what the customers are looking for? Is the machine fast and nimble to reduce mowing time? Is the machine easy to service? The daily, weekly, and monthly servicing needs to be efficient and the items for servicing need to be readily available to keep crews running on schedule.

**4** What should contractors consider as they grow their fleet?

They key is keeping their employees happy and partnering with companies that will work to make them successful. We believe that it's not just about the purchase, it's also the support beyond the sale. It's about truly caring and building relationships.

**5** What should landscape contractors consider when first entering the business?

The first item to consider is the accounts they are mowing and what size deck will accommodate the accounts. After they know what size deck they can use to mow the account appropriately, they need to consider how they will transport their equipment with the correct size truck or trailer. Beyond the size restrictions, many landscape contractors will align with a smaller commercial mower, within the Gravely products we would recommend the Gravely ZT HD, however if they are looking for a larger machine with a roll-over protection system, they can move to the Pro-Turn ZX models.

**1** What is the biggest issue that you are seeing in the commercial mower business?

Labor constraints continue to be the largest hurdle to business success and growth. To address this, we're seeing landscape contractors focus on improving the work environment for their employees. At AriensCo we have been working to help tackle this issue by focusing on driver comfort. We have been making improvements to reduce fatigue for the all-day operators.

**2** What is being done to reduce driver fatigue?

We have made improvements in the Gravely commercial line up with a focus on driver comfort. The Pro-Turn 600 models feature an independent suspension system to provide the driver all day comfort. The suspension system is self-adjusting to reduce the bumps and jolts felt when mowing. We've also added other features to focus on comfort such as air ride seat options, high back seat for better support and improved tire diameters to absorb the rough terrains commercial operators are working in.

**3** Beyond driver comfort, what other considerations should contractors consider when selecting the right mower or mowers for their business?

There are many factors to consider when selecting equipment, but I believe the number one consideration should be overall durability and product support. Equipment is a large investment and contractors should have confidence in that investment. Gravely has been supporting the industry for more than 100 years and our independent dealers provide the local support needed to keep commercial contractors going day after



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## ASK THE EXPERT

Q + A

with  
**Cris Poggi***Director, Sales Engineering & Partnerships***1** How is Aspire contributing to the success of landscape companies?

We're proud of the response we're seeing with PropertyIntel, our measuring and takeoff solution. Instead of walking a property, PropertyIntel allows you to measure sites and create takeoffs wherever you are. It integrates into the Aspire platform, automating data entry and creating consistency from bid to bid.

When estimators face quick turnarounds, they can use PropertyIntel Complete, our service that provides done-for-you estimates by our team. Aspire users are aligning with their clients and prospects better than ever before with site maps and visuals they can email straight from the system.

Timing is essential when trying to win business, and PropertyIntel is one of the ways we're helping contractors improve clarity and efficiency when serving their clients—while maintaining profits.

**Timing is essential when trying to win business, and PropertyIntel is one of the ways we're helping contractors improve clarity and efficiency when serving their clients—while maintaining profits.**

**2** What integrations does Aspire offer?

Along with PropertyIntel, Aspire has a suite of solutions we integrate with so contractors can rely on the data and reporting the platform provides without having to move from one solution to another.

Best of all, with a centralized source of truth, you can assess client profitability, identify the right opportunities, accurately price services, and forecast more effectively.

Our trusted partners include GPS tracking and fleet management solution Azuga, payroll and labor solution Inova, and more. Every business has different needs, challenges, and strengths, and our Aspire experts are here to listen to your concerns and guide you to a custom combination of integrations that save you and your team money, time, and energy.

**3** How is Aspire supporting innovation, growth, and education in the green industry?

From our partnership with ServiceTitan in 2021 and the acquisition of FieldRoutes to each of the platform integrations, we've put tremendous resources into helping our customers succeed while minimizing the challenges of change management.

This year, we're proud to join NALP as an Elite Partner, and we look forward to the opportunities we have to elevate technology in the landscaping space. We're also excited to help educate the next generation of landscape pros by collaborating with colleges and universities to teach Aspire as part of their horticulture curriculum. It's rewarding to be a part of preparing the next wave of landscape professionals and giving them a competitive advantage as they progress in the industry.

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## ASK THE EXPERT

# Q + A

## with Justin Noland

*Turf Product Manager, Kubota*

**COMMERCIAL LANDSCAPERS** today are facing more choices than ever when it comes to product solutions for their business. While exciting to have so much equipment at a landscape professionals' fingertips, it can be overwhelming to know that you're making the right choice for your business. Kubota Tractor Corporation is one company offering a range of solutions for the turf industry, so we sat down with Kubota turf product manager, Justin Noland, to get his expert POV on what can give a landscaping business the edge it needs over the competition.

### 1 What's the most important thing a pro should consider when re-evaluating their equipment lineup?

In the fast-paced world of commercial landscaping, the choice of equipment can significantly impact efficiency, productivity, and the overall success of your landscaping business. The most important decision landscape professionals face is where to make their equipment investment. Each mower comes with its own set of advantages and use cases, and a carefully calculated combination of models can prove to be a game-changer for your fleet.

### 2 What makes up a game-changing fleet in your expert opinion?

While each type of mower has its individual strengths, combining them within your commercial landscaping fleet can ensure your team is well-equipped to take on any challenge. A well-balanced fleet includes sit-down, stand-on, and walk-behind mowers to allow landscaping professionals the ability to tackle diverse projects with peak efficiency, operational flexibility, a reduction in downtime and heightened operator satisfaction.

### 3 That seems like a significant investment. What would a scaled approach look like?

It certainly can be. Luckily, Kubota makes it easy for business owners to consider all three mowers for their fleet. The Kubota Fleet Program allows landscape pros to grow and invest

in over time. Commercial customers of all sizes are eligible for a fleet discount with the purchase of just one unit. If they ever have a unit go down, the local dealer has you covered with Kubota's Ever-Go Loaner program. These are just a few examples of Kubota's own investment and commitment to helping businesses succeed.

### 4 Say you're talking to a landscaping business on the come up that isn't ready to make that kind of investment yet. How should they look at their fleet?

Any pro should first assess their client roster to make their best equipment decision for their current clients' needs. For example, businesses with large lawns, golf courses, or city parks as clients would find that sit-down, zero-turn mowers, like the Kubota Z700 Series, are a powerful tool in effectively tackling big jobs. On the other hand, businesses that have clients with properties with elaborate landscapes and tight spaces – like narrow paths and gates – should consider a stand-on mower (like our SZ Series) due to their size-considerate width, wheelbase and responsive steering function. No matter which way you choose to go, you can continue to add to your fleet and your service capabilities as you grow your business.

### 5 OK, last question. What's your ultimate product pick for any landscaper pro?

That's a tough one because there are nuances to every job. But, the sit-down, zero-turn mower is a top-tier choice for comfort and efficacy. The rider comfort they offer during long hours of operation is unmatched. If the business needs precision and ease of access? The walk-behind mower is solid due to being tough enough for every kind of turf and well-suited for properties with varying terrain, slopes, or hard-to-reach areas.

Lasting advice from an expert in the field. We're sure that businesses wish they had a Justin they can call up for advice like this. Luckily, Kubota's more than 1,100 dealerships nationwide, allow pros to find a trusted dealer to partner with and answer questions that will enhance your fleet at any time.





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## ASK THE EXPERT

Q+A

with  
**Jeff Saunders***Director, Product Management***1 What are the industry's challenges?**

Building and successfully growing a landscape business requires an understanding of the types of properties in your target area, the terrain, current and natural vegetation, and how your knowledge and skills will fit in a given region. Without a solid understanding of these factors, the overhead of identifying, marketing to, and successfully engaging new customers can greatly increase overhead costs and lost time between jobs.

Accurate and defensible estimates are critical to maintaining profit margins and customer satisfaction. Frequent site visits and poor-quality site information can ruin the planning and execution of projects, leading to costly errors and delays. However, the expense of reworking projects due to inaccurate data impacts not only profitability but also damages client relationships and brand reputation.

Lastly, there's a growing demand for landscapers to accomplish more work in less time. This requires innovative solutions capable of enhancing speed and productivity. Overcoming these pain points requires adopting modern technologies to optimize business development, site inspection, estimation, and proposals to minimize errors and ultimately increase profitability and growth.

**2 Who is Nearmap?**

Nearmap is a location intelligence and aerial imagery company that provides easy, instant access to high-resolution aerial imagery, city-scale 3D content, AI data sets, and geospatial tools. Looking at properties with Nearmap enables you to see them in a completely different way. Rotate, tilt, and change your viewing perspective to see an area from every angle. Use advanced tools to uncover what your project upon completion. This is all made possible by fusing every dimension of location intelligence into one central hub.

**3 How does Nearmap help landscape professionals?**

Our high-resolution imagery and AI-driven datasets allow for accurate site evaluations and measurements, eliminating the need for frequent site visits. This translates

to significant time and cost savings for landscaping companies. Further, our precise property intelligence enables landscapers to produce more accurate bids, minimizing the risk of expensive reworking due to inaccuracies.

With Nearmap, landscapers can take on more projects and increase their profitability. Our advanced location intelligence empowers landscapers to streamline their projects by facilitating faster quoting processes. Nearmap AI provides extra efficiency by giving users automated feature extraction to better understand properties for smoother project execution.

**4 How does Nearmap help landscapers and their customers?**

Integrating Nearmap content streamlines operations, reducing site visits and improving the accuracy of quotes and bids. This efficiency leads to faster project completion and fewer errors, enhancing the company's reputation and profitability.

Customers benefit from quicker project turnaround times, reduced reworks, and more accurate cost estimates, resulting in greater customer satisfaction and loyalty.

**5 How easy is Nearmap to use?**


Landscapers can seamlessly leverage Nearmap to optimize their workflows through our intuitive MapBrowser application or for more advanced integration, with our APIs. With Nearmap APIs, integration into existing systems becomes effortless — allowing companies to access high-resolution imagery and valuable property intelligence directly within their preferred platforms. This integration enables businesses to automate processes, enhance decision-making, and improve overall efficiency.

Nearmap MapBrowser provides an intuitive interface for exploring and analyzing property data, making it easy for users to access and act on the information they need. By leveraging our technology, companies can scale their operations by doing most of the work from their desktop. This scalability enables businesses to take on more projects, expand their client base, and ultimately increase their profitability.



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time-consuming  
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## ASK THE EXPERT

## Q + A

with  
**Rick Agajanian**

*Chief Product Officer at WorkWave*



### 1 What's going on in the world of email marketing right now?

Evolving technology is having a significant impact on email and SMS messaging – primarily in the form of new regulations over the past year which all work together to create a layered defense against phishing, email spoofing and other forms of messaging fraud.

### 2 How do those regulations affect green industry owners?

Lawn business owners typically send bulk emails for legitimate reasons, such as service information or payment notifications. But they could be at risk of not meeting the new regulations. If they are sending from Gmail or a similar service without being properly registered, their service providers may not authenticate their distributions – and their accounts could get flagged. That's why it's important to use a service that has accounted for the rules and will ensure your emails get distributed.

### 3 What are the benefits, beyond meeting regulations, of separating transactional and marketing comms?

Separating marketing and service communications can ensure that your essential communications to customers – for example, upcoming appointment notifications or an alert of a past-due bill – don't get rejected or sent to spam. Service and marketing communications are regulated separately; if they're not, you run the risk of your service communications getting blocked either by the customer who doesn't want marketing emails, or by service providers who don't recognize them as essential.

### 4 What tools has RealGreen built to address these challenges?

Customer Notifications allows you to send automatic service emails based on rules you set up. It also enables you to build your own templates, so that you can control your content.

### 5 What should green industry owners be looking for in a notifications platform?

I'd recommend looking for a notification platform that is flexible, provides the features you need, complies with all current regulations and most importantly, comes from a reliable provider that you can trust. Another important thing to consider is using a platform that integrates with your software, which will make it easier to provide accurate, reliable communications to your customers.

### 6 What are the benefits of maintaining an automated marketing email platform?

With an automated marketing platform, you can set up specific communications based on what really works: the types of communications, the frequency and cadence of messaging, even the day or time that's best to reach them. This enables you to set up a customer journey, lay out the specific touch points and then keep it all going without ever having to worry about it.

### 7 What tools and automations do you think are next in the world of email marketing?

You need to make sure that your communications are compelling enough to get those clicks and opens to drive engagement. There's no question that AI is going to increasingly be used in content creation. And as AI tools continue to evolve, so will the ways we can use them to create compelling content. Imagine a dynamic email template, where the template uses AI to pull in content that is unique to individual customers and tailors each email to feel more personalized: This could dramatically change the feel of bulk email distribution. However, we're not quite there yet – those nuances will take time to perfect and AI-generated content is far from a magic bullet. Regardless, if you are using an AI tool to create content, it's crucial to make sure you review and edit the output; the last thing you need is for a customer to receive an email that comes off as artificial or unprofessional.





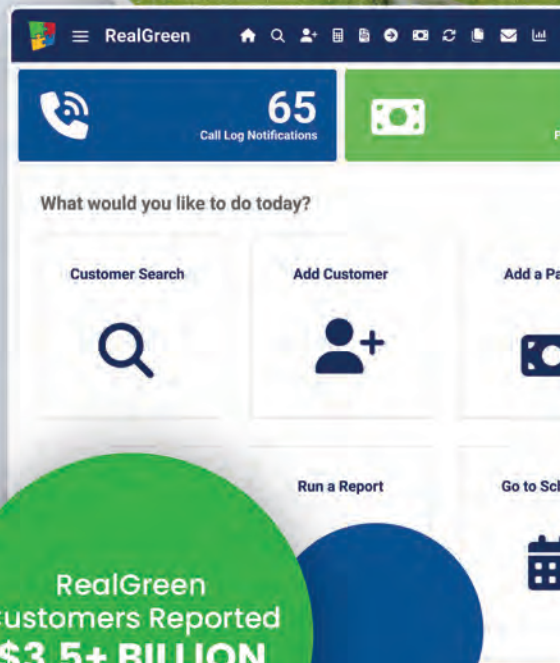
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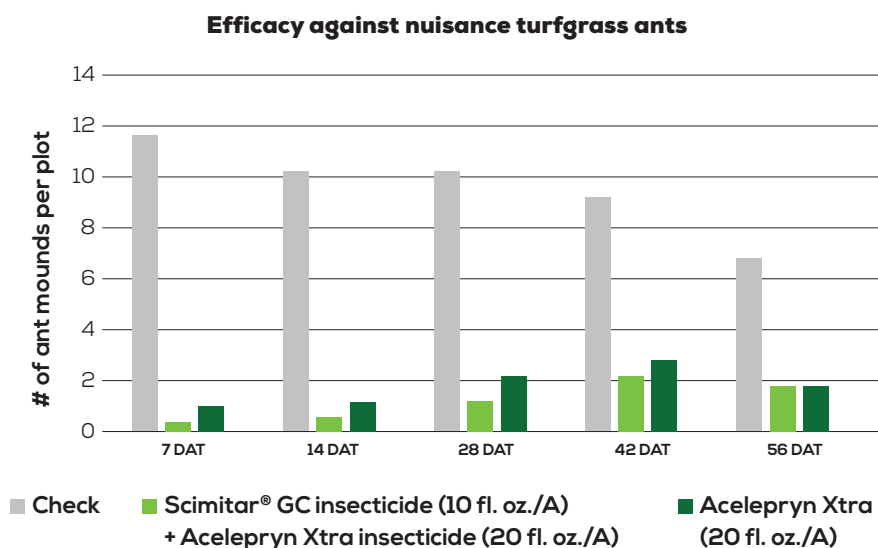
# Q + A

with  
**Matt Giese, M.S.**

*Technical Services Manager for Syngenta*

## 1 Compared to Acelepryn, what additional insects can be controlled with Acelepryn Xtra?

In addition to providing season-long control of grubs, billbugs and caterpillars with just one application, **Acelepryn® Xtra insecticide also controls ants, suppresses mole crickets and offers early curative control of grubs through the second instar.** Moreover, it provides chinch bug control instead of just suppression, including **at least six weeks of hairy chinch bug control and at least three months of guaranteed southern chinch bug control.**



One application was made on July 14, 2023. Treatments were watered in with 0.1-inch irrigation within 24 hours. Source: Steve McDonald, Turfgrass Disease Solutions, 2023.

## 2 How does Acelepryn Xtra offer enhanced grub control for lawn care operators (LCOs)?

The Acelepryn rate for grubs is between 8-16 fl. oz./A (the common rate for grubs is 8 fl. oz./A). Acelepryn Xtra offers greater efficacy against grubs at the 20 fl. oz./A rate, as it is equivalent to 10 fl. oz./A of Acelepryn along with a full rate of thiamethoxam (Meridian® 25WG insecticide). This means that with Acelepryn Xtra, LCOs can expand the spectrum of control as well as increase efficacy.

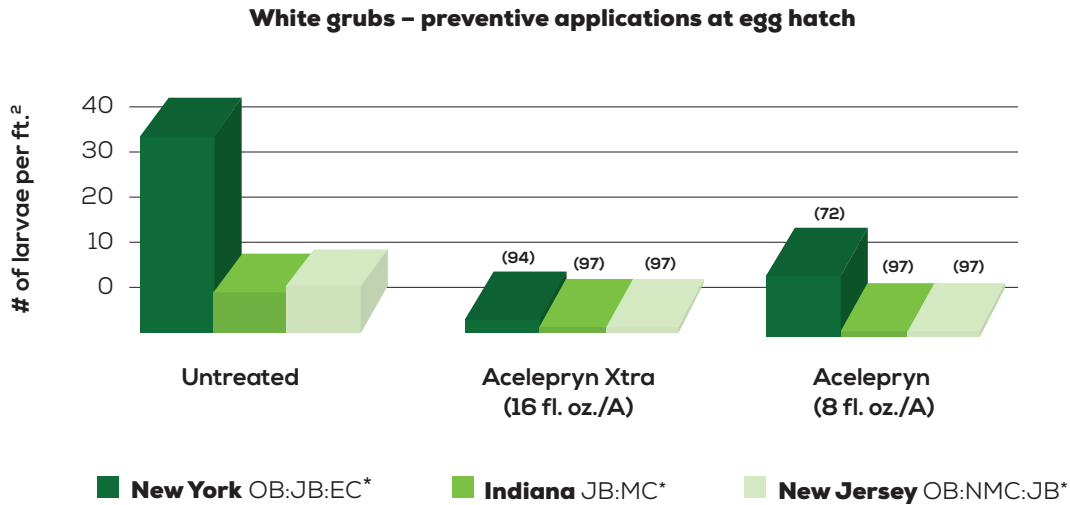
## 3 How can LCOs get GUARANTEED insect control with Acelepryn Xtra?

LCOs have multiple options for treatment programs that are fully backed by Syngenta so they have confidence in what they are applying. The *GreenTrust® 365 Grub, Billbug & Caterpillar Prevention Guarantee* provides recommended rates and timing to ensure season-long control, or Syngenta will provide the products needed for retreatment at no charge. Additionally, the *GreenTrust 365 St. Augustinegrass Guarantee* provides at least 90 days of guaranteed control of southern chinch bugs and tropical sod webworms, as well as guaranteed grub control. These programs can give LCOs peace of mind and additional value for their customers.

## 4 How do the application windows differ between Acelepryn Xtra and Acelepryn?

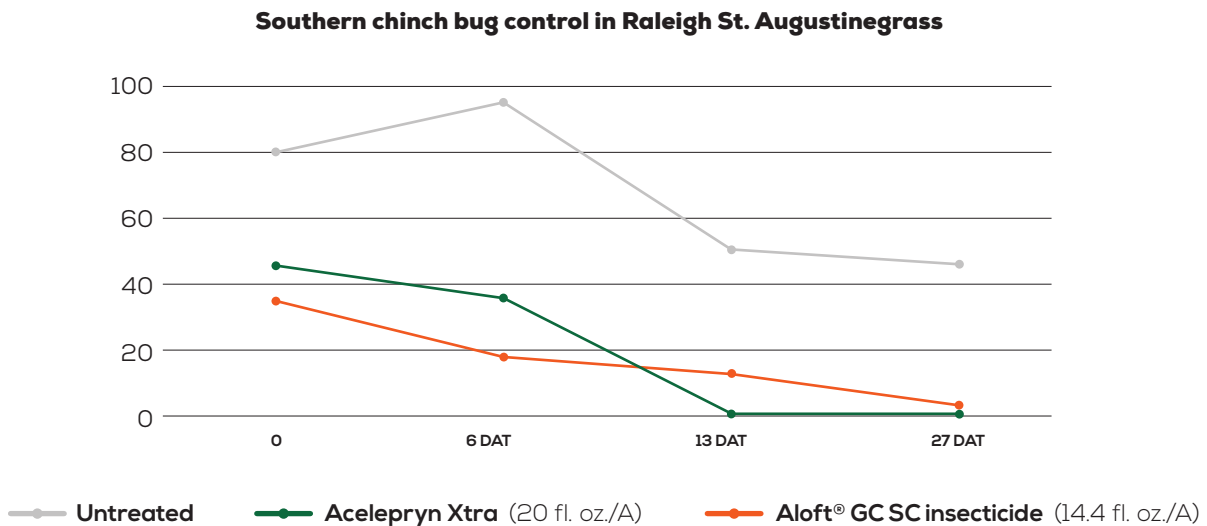
Both products can be applied as early as April for season-long control of caterpillars and grubs. With its early curative grub control, Acelepryn Xtra can be applied as late as the end of July to target ants, billbugs and chinch bugs while maintaining leading grub control.





While Acelepryn Xtra was applied at 16 fl. oz./A, the recommended rate of 20 fl. oz./A may result in greater control.

Source: Seaman, Richmond and Koppenhofer, New York, Indiana and New Jersey, 2020. Application dates were July 5, 2020 in New York; June 16, 2020 in Indiana; and June 24, 2020 in New Jersey. Values in parentheses indicate the percent of untreated control for each treatment at its respective location. \*OB = Oriental beetle. JB = Japanese beetle. EC = European chafer. MC = Masked chafer. NMC = Northern masked chafer.



Source: Rick Brandenburg, Holly Springs, North Carolina, 2019. Treatments applied once on July 26, 2019 and sprayed in 56 gallons of water per acre.

Performance assessments are based upon results or analysis of public information, field observations and/or internal Syngenta evaluations. Trials reflect treatment rates commonly recommended in the marketplace.

**5 How does Acelepryn Xtra fit within an agronomic program?** Because Acelepryn Xtra offers broad-spectrum control with a wide application window, it is an ideal choice for controlling pests when the timing works best. Additionally, **while it is recommended that Acelepryn Xtra is watered in, it can still be effective even if homeowners**

**do not water it in**, or if there is a lack of rainfall immediately after application. For a comprehensive list of agronomic programs featuring Acelepryn Xtra, visit [GreenCastOnline.com/LawnPrograms](https://www.GreenCastOnline.com/LawnPrograms).

For more information, visit [GreenCastOnline.com/AceleprynXtra](https://www.GreenCastOnline.com/AceleprynXtra). You can also easily

determine which Acelepryn brand is right for your operation by visiting [GreenCastOnline.com/AceleprynBrands](https://www.GreenCastOnline.com/AceleprynBrands).

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## ASK THE EXPERT

Q + A

with  
**Brent Oberlink***President of The Better Contractor***1 Why is it crucial for new businesses to prioritize training from day one, even when on a tight budget?**

Early training lays a strong foundation. Without it, businesses risk building upon shaky ground. They will scale chaos. The reason most franchises are successful are because they have structure, procedures, and a plan that works. It's no different for your business. As we expand, it becomes increasingly challenging and expensive to correct foundational issues. Starting with solid training ensures sustainable growth without the chaos, from day one. It's absolutely critical to have employee training and onboarding in place, if not, you are missing out on profit and growth.

**2 How does implementation of training and education influence a company's culture and employee morale?**

Starting with a culture of continuous learning sets the tone for the entire company. Employees feel valued, knowing their growth is a priority. This not only boosts morale but also fosters loyalty and productivity. When you hire a new employee, the onboarding and training process is setting the tone for them – what will you tolerate, what do you expect, and what does your company stand for? If you do not set a standard and culture up front, employees will set their own – and it may not be the standard you want set. In today's world, employees want to work somewhere with a good culture, somewhere that values quality of work, and that has a vision. Your onboarding and training program is absolutely critical to that.

**3 How does adequate training impact the safety and efficiency of landscaping jobs?**

Training goes hand in hand with safety and quality. In 2021 alone, 142 landscaping industry workers suffered fatal workplace injuries. Proper training could help mitigate such risks, ensuring both the safety of workers and project efficiency. Not having training opens you up to liability as the owner. Not to mention the increased insurance costs, unnecessary bills, and headache of paperwork resulting from an incident. You should be genuinely concerned about the safety and well-being of your workforce, if you are not, you will have morale and retention issues. You will get your lunch ate by

a competitor that does care. If you can invest a few hundred dollars a month in order to prevent an injury or fatality – that should 100% be worth it. And even if you remove the human component, you are money ahead to train people to do the work safely and with quality in mind.

**4 How do you envision the future of the landscaping industry?**

I foresee an industry prioritizing innovation and safety. Continuous learning will be at its core, making platforms like The Better Contractor even more pivotal. The younger generation wants to advance and learn, it wants to see there is opportunity at your company. Therefore, you must stand out. You can stand out by having the best equipment, setting a great culture, having training to help your team advance, and paying them a living wage. I do believe there will come a time soon when the cheap and low-quality contractors will struggle even more to exist. There will be consolidation, and customers will start looking at companies that value quality, safety, care for their employees, and who have well-maintained equipment. It's your choice to step it up and be one of the forward-thinking landscape companies that excel in this new economy.

**5 Can training influence employee retention?**

Definitely! Employees value employers who invest in their growth. Continuous training can lead to higher job satisfaction and, consequently, improved retention rates. Employees want to move up the ladder, they want to learn, and they want to work somewhere that has values. You must be creating growth opportunities (then sell that growth to them as advancement opportunities), have training opportunities for them to exceed and move up the ladder, and create an environment where they believe they are working at one of the best companies in that business. You can't do that by paying cheap, bidding cheap, not training, and buying old equipment. Set the standard up front with onboarding and then keep training them so that continuous improvement is always on their radar. Create a culture around that mindset and people will want to stay.



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## ASK THE EXPERT

## Q+A

with  
**Richard Ogawa**

*CEO & Co-Founder of Towa Industries, Inc.  
and Owner of Gardenland Power Equipment, Campbell, CA*



## 1 What factors should landscapers consider when transitioning from Gas-To-Battery?

Before landscapers begin the transition to battery there are three key factors we recommend considering:

- **Selecting Equipment:** We recommend taking a quick inventory of the equipment your crews will need in their fleet (e.g. Handheld tools, Blowers, Mowers). Handheld tools are typically the easiest battery adoption tool because they have readily available charging options and often offer commercial-grade performance. We suggest picking the best battery-powered tool for the job and your business.

- **Calculating how many batteries you need:** Once you've decided what tools to electrify, you can then determine the number of batteries required for the job. In most cases, Handheld Tools will function well with 2 batteries per tool depending on the job or project, high-power consumers like backpack blowers and mowers may require more spare batteries to last you all day long.

- **Budgeting for Initial Investment Costs:** Batteries and Chargers are going to be one of the highest costs when converting your fleet of battery-powered equipment. Assess your budget and prepare for the higher initial capital investment required to transition from gas to battery-powered equipment. While battery tools may initially cost 2-5 times more than their gas counterparts.

## 2 What should you consider when choosing a battery platform?

Unlike gas, which is brand agnostic, going battery means you have to consider that each brand has its own charging system when choosing battery equipment. We recommend choosing your brand platform wisely, considering the overall value and reliability of their battery system across your fleet's equipment and the quality of batteries they are using in their products. American Green Zone Alliance (AGZA) often tests and certifies Zero-Emissions equipment for the safety and reliability of different battery-powered equipment. TOWA's Power Distribution Managers (PDM) were designed to specifically help battery-powered tool users charge their tools at scale regardless of the brand. TOWA's PDM enables charging on the outlet level, allowing Landscapers to leverage their existing and fastest chargers from any brand to efficiently charge any batteries for a fraction of the cost compared to larger bank charging systems.

## 3 How do you set up your charging infrastructure effectively?

Depending on the number and size of batteries needed, you may need to upgrade or update your charging setup to ensure efficient and timely charging for all equipment. This typically requires bringing in an electrician to install additional circuits and sub-panels which can cost thousands of dollars and is typically not feasible for those that are renting their warehouses or workplace. TOWA's PDMs SmartChargers are designed to help Landscapers charge their battery tools at scale by reducing the number of circuits needed to charge equipment from 6 circuits to 1 by actively managing and measuring the available headroom in a circuit to fully utilize the circuit's capacity. TOWA's PDM works by simply plugging your PDM into a single dedicated outlet in your wall and managing power with active load balancing technology, so you can efficiently charge from any brand to their batteries on the same managed circuit without having to purchase each brand's proprietary sequential charging systems.

## 4 How can you set up your trailer for mobile and on-site charging with minimal costs?

Typically converting trailers to support mobile battery charging can be an expensive and complicated process including installing inverters, solar panels, and large power stations or generators. With TOWA's PDM and Battery Power Stations (BPS Systems), you can get up to 17.5kWh of mobile power removing the need to transport batteries to and from a trailer to charge overnight. Simply plug in your trailer into TOWA's PDM and BPS Systems which work together to manage and rotate power to your battery fleet. This keeps all of your equipment in your trailer overnight and ensures that your equipment is ready to go when you are. With mobile power on board, Landscapers can also minimize the number of spare batteries that need to be carried off-site and swap out their fully charged batteries with any used batteries for continuous charging support throughout the day.

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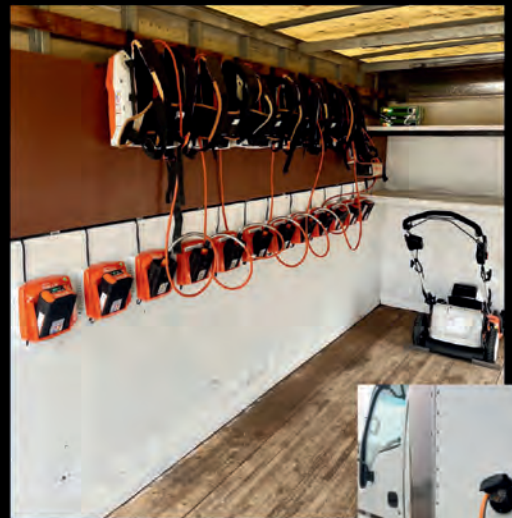
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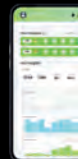
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## RAISE THE BAR

WITH JUSTIN WHITE  
CEO OF K&D LANDSCAPING

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**RAISE THE BAR** is a monthly column by Justin White, CEO of K&D Landscaping, written to help improve professionalism in the green industry.

# THE STATE OF WATER MANAGEMENT

→ **WATER MANAGEMENT AND IRRIGATION** service businesses are gaining momentum across the country, especially in the western regions. Landscape professionals are increasing their focus on sustainable practices, driven by both environmental concerns and client demand. And at the heart of this sustainability movement is water management. This magazine regularly has a story on water management as this topic is making its way into more industry conversations.

At K&D, we strive to be a trailblazer in this sector, so in 2022 we launched a Water Management brand and held our first Water Summit to bring leaders in the industry together to talk specifically about water management. Last month was our third annual Water Summit and it was the largest one yet. The collection of industry leaders from across our nation reinforced the importance of water management as we navigate the early stages of very pivotal next steps for landscapers. Here is a quick recap from some of our speakers:

Kam Brian, CEO of Par3 Landscaping in Las Vegas, gave a great presentation on how they have saved almost a billion gallons of water (yes, a billion!) for their clients. He also shared the pictures of the water police in Las Vegas, which is a soon-to-be reality for many of us in the west.

Max Moreno, director of technology & water management at Everthrive Landscape in Southern California, shared insights on the AB1572 law that recently passed in California and what it means to provide water management as a service. This is a recurring income model that helps to save water while providing clients with clear measurables on how their site is performing from a water use standpoint.

DJ Seeger, president of Seeger Water in Austin, Texas, shared how engagement within our industry is key to ensure we have a seat at the table when new legislation is being developed. His team is involved at the local, state and federal level to help advocate for the future of water management.

Michael Johnson of H2orticulture Services spoke on California water challenges and how old legislation such as MWEL0 (Model Water Efficiency Landscape Ordinance) is creating

opportunities for water management companies to create a revenue stream.

Our industry panel included representatives from Hunter Irrigation, SmartLink by Weathermatic and Hydropoint. We learned about new technologies available to irrigators, how the IoT (internet of things) is changing the way smart irrigation systems communicate, and that the speed of innovation is picking up with the availability of AI.

Landscapers are squarely in the crosshairs of our community and lawmakers when it comes to wasting water. For this reason we must, as an industry, stay one step ahead of this process. We must be the ones to govern ourselves and help our landscapes thrive with less water in areas where water is scarce.

If we fail on this critical issue, we may be left with laws that outright restrict using potable water to irrigate our landscapes, throwing an entire industry into chaos and destruction. Together we can turn the tide and create a positive movement within our communities, aimed toward sustainability and growth. **L&L**

↓  
**AS WATER  
CONTINUES TO BE A  
HOT BUTTON ISSUE,**  
the green industry  
needs to be  
governing itself on  
water usage.



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