

Why must we flounder with inconsistent advice?

It was great to see such well argued and thought provoking articles by Arne van Amerongen and Tony Howarth in the May issue. My first reaction was to note that the subject matter was basically the everlasting debate about *Poa annua*, fescue and bent. All this indicates to me that after twenty years of political in-fighting between rigid dogma and liberal experimentation by agronomists, we are no further forward toward any consensus on even the basic ground rules, such as grass species and subsequent management.

I am sure we all agree that pure fescue greens licked keen by sea breezes are the only true golf greens. On established greens anywhere, management by Arthurian principles is the best way to try and emulate them. New constructions on inland sites are, however, surely a case apart. The specification of the seed mix and in many cases the planning of the aftercare is generally in the hands of agronomists.

Some stick doggedly to sowing fescue where it is surrounded by *Poa annua*. The new sward, subjected to heavy play and minimalist policies can only result in a weak turf ripe for invasion. Others sow creeping bents with scant regard for whether the resources to manage such a grass (including the ability to limit winter play) are in existence or not. Whatever has been tried, it seems there has been very little success in producing *Poa annua* free greens. Those that have owe it more to a cut-it-out-and-patch-it policy that any my granny could have come up with. Mind you, for those who have the resources, as yet it is a better solution than anything agronomic.

Whilst all other sectors of the turf industry have formed associations to agree basic standards there seems to be no consensus among agronomists. It seems that anyone can become an agronomist and that a new theory is a necessary entrance qualification. If there were four agronomists in a crowded room you would have no trouble finding them. Each would be in his corner expounding his latest ideas, none would agree.

Where does all this inconsistent advice leave the poor greenkeeper? Five years down the road on a new construction he either feels guilt-ridden for applying extra fertiliser to achieve any kind of grass cover, or ashamed of the thin, bumpy greens because he sticks rigidly to agro-

nomical policies which are plainly not appropriate and have already failed to cope with the wear.

Some consensus needs to be reached among agronomists about what is and what is not possible under today's conditions. The first rule of management is that all objectives must be attainable. If they are not then morale suffers and job satisfaction goes out of the window. Luckily, greenkeepers work with their feet on the ground: there are no handy ledges from which to jump.

At a time when the reliability of physical laboratory tests has been seriously questioned, with no apparent response from the Sports Turf Research Institute, what confidence can the greenkeeper have to get on with the job of applying agronomic principles and yet be sure of the outcome. In such difficult times we need the combined strength of all our respected agronomists working together to help greenkeepers. Standards and guide-lines need to be formulated and explained to the client in no uncertain terms, even to the extent of saying that if they want creeping bent greens then they should have separate winter greens, or in certain inland situations, if they want fescue/ bent greens they may need to restrict play or implement a policy of re-turfing every six to ten years. Whatever is required, it needs spelling out clearly so that greenkeepers do not take the blame for disappointed customers with impossible dreams.

If you are about to embark on a new project in hostile meadow grass country, my advice would be to seek out the agronomist who drew up the seed mix and rootzone specification and ask him for a detailed management programme for establishment and future maintenance.

If it is not forthcoming, then inform your employer that he is about to buy the equivalent of an expensive car with no service manual and no guarantee. If there is a programme, agree it in detail, follow it, monitor it and as soon as something goes wrong – call in your employer and the agronomist to agree a plan of action. Last of all, have a large turf nursery and half a dozen two inch pluggers ready and waiting.

■ Having got that off my chest, I must comment on Jim Arthur's wormkilling article in the same issue. Mr Arthur is properly revered in greenkeeping circles for the enormous support he has given greenkeepers and for the humorous and forthright way he has imparted his vast knowledge to anyone who cared to listen – and indeed some who did not! Given this background I am understandably reluctant to criticise, but the tone of his article suggested he expected criticism and I would hate to disappoint him. The gist of his complaint seemed to be that interfering busybodies had deprived us of lead arsenate. Well, three cheers for interfering busybodies. As someone who can remember walking up and down in white, billowing clouds with a hanky tied round my mouth, I am appalled by the idea of using such chemicals and frankly can hardly believe I was told to use them – even then.

Mr Arthur states that lead arsenate has not killed any greenkeepers, something that no-one can be sure of, nor can we be sure whether it has caused serious medical problems or not. It is debatable whether, in the hands of a conscientious course manager, it constitutes a danger, but he knows very well that some are more conscientious than

others and accidents can happen.

There is also the manufacture and disposal of waste products from such nasties to consider. Though our own chemical companies are no doubt well regulated, our second-class citizens in third world countries are often exploited – with scant regard for their health and safety. The sooner such materials are resigned to the dustbin of history the better. At a time when golf courses need to advertise their environmental awareness to survive, we need mention of 'good ole' lead arsenate like we need artificial greens!

There was a time when the 'Greens' were thought of as a cranky few, but Mr Arthur better take note that they now are important enough to have sustained viable organic farming, a mass industry of environmentally friendly products, saved and protected countless species of flora and fauna and to have representation in every serious political party in the Western world. What were the 'Greens' are now a large section of our society who understand that if the Earth's resources are left in the hands of a few free marketeers, with commercial exploitation by the unscrupulous, then there would be no reduction in CFC's so that we might have freedom to enjoy the sun like our forefathers without the now serious risk of skin cancer, no introduction of lead free petrol to protect our children's health and no whales to marvel at.

I whole-heartedly agree that we must banish the worm for fine turf to thrive. Worm activity lasts around six months and this necessitates three spray applications of Thiphanate methyl at a cost of £1200 per annum to keep our twenty-seven holes worm free. If this amount of expenditure is barely enough to warrant registration of chemicals, then what chance lead arsenate being applied every eight years? If it had not been banned it would surely have disappeared long ago due to lack of market.

I have nothing but admiration for Jim Arthur and publicly thank him for all the times he has sparked lights in my brain and brought a smile to my lips. However, my loyalties lie with my staff, my members and my little piece of England, the stewardship of which I am all the more grateful for – as any Scot down here should be.

■ The author, Kerran Daly, MGC, is course manager at the Salisbury and South Wilts Golf Club.



Master Greenkeeper **KERRAN DALY** joins the *Poa* debate and questions Jim Arthur on ways to kill worms