

"'66 — THE YEAR THE GRASS DIED"

BUT AMERICA WILL BE BEAUTIFUL AGAIN

By Vaclav J. Zolman

The "Lima News", Lima, Ohio, on December 1, 1966, published an article by Paul Harvey entitled: "'66 The Year the Grass Died." Mr. Harvey seems to be really interested in the condition of our parks, gardens and golf courses and tries to mobilize "our brainpower" to save our turf grasses. His aim is therefore to be commended, because not only our turf grasses, but also the health of our broad public is at stake.

With all respect for Mr. Harvey, we have to realize that we are not living in the time of old fashioned alchemy and therefore cannot expect any miracles. Although we are living in the atomic age, we know that the **only** way to save our turf grasses (and that means business also) is by following the Law of Nature.

The evolution of turf management is similar to and is following in the footsteps of certain branches of agriculture. These may be described in three significant periods:

1. The basic one, depending largely on practical experience, without any research.
2. The temporary period of practice connected with certain results of research.
3. The period in which all or most decisions are based on results of research. For example, animal breeding is, so to speak, in the third period, while turf management appears to have reached only the second period.

If we want to save our turf grasses we have to take advantage of and apply the results of research, which in many instances is wasted because it is not applied in practice or is applied only in a general way or in a wrong way. There must be very thorough and systematic research of each part of the golf course (greens, tees, fairways) to find out and locate any problem. After locating the various problems, we must find — through research again — the best way by which these problems can be eliminated.

At the present time the main problems confronting golf courses are grass diseases and fungi. We are still not in possession of absolutely resistant varieties of turf grasses and we cannot control the climatic conditions. However, we can help partially by irrigation. There are some chemicals to control diseases and fungi. But if there is a deep seated environmental problem in the soil or irrigation water, resulting in lowering of grass disease resistance, the chemical means cannot stop the disease.

The turf superintendent has at his disposal today all kinds of weapons which he can successfully use if he has at hand all results of research gained primarily from his golf course and information from his immediate area. For example: analytical research and suggested corrective treatment of the superintendent's golf course, can be obtained by contacting a soil expert. Two pamphlets which will give turf superintendents a deeper and more thorough understanding of problems in the immediate area are "Golf Course Problems in the Atomic Age" and "Irrigation Water and Related Golf Course Problems in the Chicago Area." Both of these by Vaclav J. Zolman are ready for publication.

Systematic work based on research always brings good results. Mr. Williams, the superintendent of

Bob-O-Link Golf Course, is one of the most progressive Chicago area superintendents. He had his problems with unbalanced soil environment and defective irrigation water but he eliminated these problems a few years ago. In 1965 he had the best balanced fairways in the entire Chicago area. He "raised" a few young men who are today superintendents on their own, and we can say that undoubtedly the proverb, "Pupils will be better than the teacher" will be fulfilled.

Harold Fredrickson, superintendent of Edgewood Valley Golf Course never had a better golf course than in the year 1966; Oscar Miles, superintendent of Olympia Fields Country Club on Chicago's south side had his best turf in the 1966 season; George Druzizski, a very modest superintendent of Thorngate Golf Course in Deerfield, Illinois, had one of the best shaped turfs, especially on the fairways. These and other golf courses in the Chicago area are examples of the value of turf management based on sound research analysis of soil and water supply.

From the figures of research analysis it is possible to predict certain troubles on greens and fairways when the soil environment is extremely unbalanced. Trouble is imminent when some factors are at a harmful level and other elements are absolutely depleted, especially on the golf courses 30-50-60 years old, which were badly constructed or have been chemically ruined. Very often the harmful effects in the soil are compounded by the use of defective irrigation water.

The superintendents were rarely sleeping at night during the 1966 season. It is admirable the way they were vigorously fighting for every inch of their green turfs. In the most critical period (June 15 to the end of July) they were doing everything possible for the prestige of the golf clubs and for the recreation of the golfers.

Success of the summer of 1966 proves we can keep America beautiful and our turfs in excellent condition if we will use the research and apply the scientific principles which are available.

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