

TURF MANAGEMENT

A. J. Powell, Jr., Turf Specialist

Beware of "Satchmo"

Hopefully not everyone has had a "Satchmo" visit his turf operation. But chances are good that "Satchmo" has appeared but was not recognized. "Satchmo", by my definition, is an out-of-town peddler with a "satchel full" of "more gifts than a gift shop". For a minimum order of \$67.00, your wife will receive a new pop-up toaster or knife sharpener. And along with your pocket knife, pen and pencil set and bill-fold, you can have a choice between a \$17.00 brief-case or your very own manicure set.

Think again before you bind yourself in such a deal. Why is he so generous and your local dealer so stingy? Is he trying to steal your business or is he only concerned about the quality of your turf operation? **Of course**, all of his gifts to you and your wife would not make you feel obligated to him on a return trip. **Of course**, he would not hint around you, your boss, or laborers that you had accepted these gifts. **Of course**, he would not try to increase that minimum order on the next return trip. To be so generous, he must be considering you as very influential among your peers and associates.

What is your first impression of Satchmo? Suppose Satchmo visits a golf course. Inside his satchel of gifts he also carries a 674 page notebook that describes products for the club house ranging from salt to floor wax, products for the golf pro ranging from kilties to marshmallow centered driving range balls, and products for the superintendent ranging from axle grease to chelated iron. Many of his products are similar to those you are presently using, but without the actual label you may never recognize them. Many of his products are "fantastic new discoveries" packaged for your convenience. Hopefully, he comes to you first instead of trying to soft-sell one of your mechanics on the type of tube sealant he needs or your boss on the very recent discovery of "Poa Out" for complete **Poa annua** eradication. Very often his "bag" is name-tossing. John Brown uses six tons per year of his liquid mow and Pebble Run saves \$20,000 annually in labor by using his liquid sand that never needs raking.

If you have time, take a look at his products and judge their worth yourself. Always compare his delivered cost with that of your local dealer. Very often, Satchmo will be able to do no more than read his company's advertisements about the products in question. Play the Agronomist part and question the correctness of the advertisements. Put him on the spot, and he may never return. Although you have been very successful with a cheaper product, he may list 25 reasons why his product is better. Is a free coin purse any reason to switch from a good product to one that you are not familiar with?

Hopefully, you will feel that Satchmo is disrespectful since he is trying to sell you a miracle product. Soil microbes or soil enzymes boxed and ready to mix with fertilizer or water are often sold with astounding assurance that they actually cure soil problems of plant food availability, soil structure, and permeability.

Another product often misrepresented is the surfactant. No doubt, surfactants have been successful for special use situations, but general use to solve fertility or management problems is unfeasible. By decreasing water surface tension, surfactants have been used to relieve puddling in depression areas, to increase infiltration or decrease water run-off on small knolls, and to decrease dew formation. Therefore, know your needs and buy these materials accordingly. The percent surfactant in a material and its residual nature should be considered when comparing prices.

Satchmo practically always promotes liquid fertilizers. He knows that a good turf operation has labor problems and a pressure sprayer. He often stresses that the phosphorus in liquid fertilizers are very soluble and therefore quickly available. Also the liquid material offers foliar feeding and penetrates deeper into the root zone area. Do you believe these suggested advantages?

Concerning phosphorus availability, most granular phosphates are in an available form when applied. However with either a liquid or granular phosphorus material, if there is complete soil-phosphorus contact, usually 30% or more of the phosphorus is fixed in unavailable forms within a short time. Experiments conducted to date show that usually the same crop responses are obtained with liquid and solid fertilizers when equal amounts of nitrogen, phosphate and potash are applied.

Liquid fertilizers have helped from the labor standpoint for many turf growers because they can be applied through a sprayer. Many liquid fertilizers can be mixed with pesticides that are routinely applied. The actual effectiveness of liquid fertilizers does not differ greatly from that of granular fertilizers. Before purchasing, compare the cost of liquid versus granular materials that give the same amount of plant food. If the cost of the liquid material is greater, then assess whether the extra cost is worth the handling advantages.

Your local salesmen and distributors might not appear to be Santa Clauses, but they are interested in your turf operation. Being concerned is their "bread and butter" and they must give you good service or lose your business. "Satchmo" on the other hand, may only be interested in one or a few purchases because his margin of profit is high and he is not required to consult with you weekly or daily. As professional turf growers, work as closely as possible with your local dealers. And the next time that "Satchmo" visits your turf operation, ask him to accompany you to the next professional turf meeting. His response might amaze you.

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