



Fairways of the Future

Topdressing fairways is gaining popularity in different regions of the country as a means of producing drier, firmer playing conditions on courses with heavy soils.

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In our fast-paced society, the spirit of competition exerts a constant force on both personal achievement and product development. In the game of golf, one can simply look at the stunning performance of Tiger Woods at The Masters and the ever-increasing size of the driver head for two examples of how the competitive human spirit has once again raised the public's expectations for performance.

In the arena of golf course management, the expectations held by golfers are also creeping upwards as individual courses continue to upgrade their maintenance programs. Nowhere is

this ratcheting up of maintenance standards more evident than in the care of the fairways. The most recent improvements in fairway care include the regular use of growth regulators, the routine application of sand topdressing, improved lightweight mowing equipment, and expanded irrigation coverage.

Having switched over to lightweight fairway mowing equipment, most courses maintaining creeping bentgrass fairways came face-to-face with the dilemma of clipping disposal. Some courses elected to collect the clippings and either compost them or dispose of them off-site, while others chose to spread them out in rough areas with large manure spreaders. Short-handed maintenance crews that

were incapable of collecting clippings had little choice but to leave the debris lying on the fairways.

In response to the clipping dilemma, many courses are now applying a growth regulator on a regimented schedule commencing after the threat of frost has passed in the spring and continuing up until three to four weeks before the first threat of frost in the fall. In addition to reducing clipping production by as much as 50 to 70 percent, the use of growth regulators has also decreased the mowing frequency and made it possible for some to mow during the afternoons when both the turf and soil are relatively dry. Looking forward, the use of growth regulators on the

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fairways will, for many, become standard operating procedure now that product chemistry is such that side effects, such as yellowing and delayed divot recovery, are no longer an issue.

Looking toward the future, it is also likely that the practice of applying sand topdressing on the fairways will begin to gain popularity in the Chicagoland area by the turn of the next century. While presently viewed as extravagant or even unnecessary by some, this practice has become popular in the Pacific Northwest. Having accumulated one to two inches of sand topdressing on the fairways, Oregonians and Washingtonians now enjoy drier, firmer playing conditions when Mother Nature steps in to take over the irrigation of their courses. These results are very similar to those that were achieved on putting greens across the country when sand topdressing became popular in the 1970s.

In regard to the nuts and bolts of fairway topdressing, the goal (similar for putting greens) is to accumulate a layer of sand that protects heavy soils from compaction and prevents the thatch from developing an unhealthy, sponge-like characteristic. To achieve this goal, sand topdressing is best applied several times during the growing season at a rate light enough to prevent the destruction of mowing equipment. This, undoubtedly, requires the purchase of a large capacity topdresser that can spread sand evenly at a very efficient pace.

To prevent soil layering caused by breaking up aeration cores on top of the accumulating sand layer, courses will also have to adjust their aeration programs. For example,



To accommodate fairway topdressing, courses may have to start removing aeration cores so that the soil brought to the surface does not contaminate the accumulating sand layer.

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a course may elect to rely on solid tine aeration or to continue with traditional hollow tine aeration but remove the cores rather than break them up over the surface of the fairways.

Continuing on in our discussion to the practice of fairway mowing, most superintendents know that the turfgrass industry

reached a new height in 1997 when Congressional Country Club elected to use walk-behind mowers in preparation for the U.S. Open. While using walk-behind mowers is certainly out of the question for everyday maintenance, it is clear that courses are still searching for the ultimate fairway mower. Generally speaking, courses with creeping bentgrass fairways are looking for mowers with larger tires, lighter cutting heads, less abrasive rollers, and vertical mowing attachments in an effort to do a better job of cutting the grass and minimizing physical wear 'n' tear on the perimeter cleanup pass.

Whether tomorrow's lightweight fairway mower has three, five or seven cutting heads, two-wheel or four-wheel drive, or seven- or eleven-bladed reels seems unclear. What is clear is that the ultimate mowing machine has not yet been designed simply because the temptation to mow with walk-behind mowers in front of a

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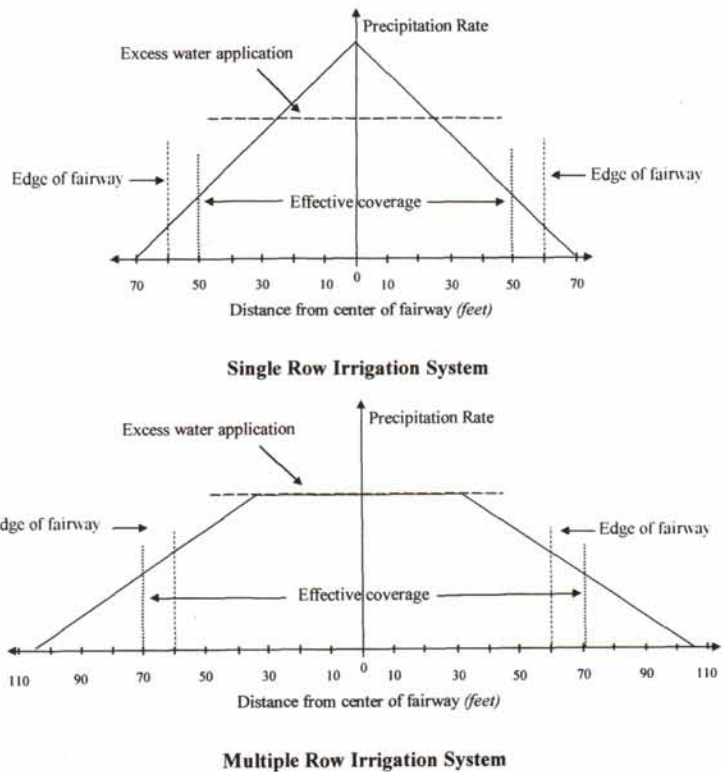
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national audience is too great to ignore.

Continuing on the topic of technology, once man's ability to control water from the sky becomes a reality, courses will no longer have to rely on irrigation systems to maintain perfect fairways. Until this day arrives, however, the simple truth about fairway irrigation is that multiple rows of sprinkler heads are far better than a single row. For this reason alone, course after course is installing a new irrigation system to keep up with the golfers' demands for perfection from tree line to tree line.

In Illustration 1, the water distribution between a single row irrigation system and a multiple row irrigation system shows how multiple rows provide a more

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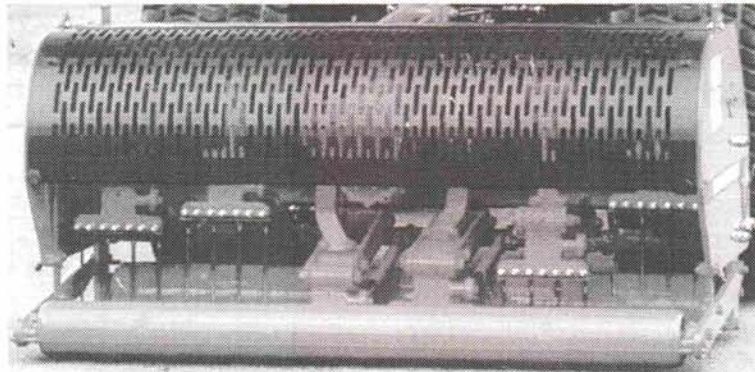


*Illustration 1:
Comparative water distribution between a single row irrigation system and multiple row irrigation system.*

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Medinah C.C. is working towards the August 1999 PGA event, but they are also being considered for the 2003 Ryder Cup. These events will be great for Medinah C.C. and Danny Quast, CGCS, as well as for the greater Chicagoland area.

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In early November, Olympia Fields C.C. was selected as the site for the U.S. Open in 2003. Olympia Fields is ranked in the top 100 courses in the country. It has been the site of the 1925 and 1961 PGA Championships and hosted the 1928 Open. Also this past summer, it was the site of the U.S. Senior Open.
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Remember, MAGCS members, to call your friends across the country to tell them what a great guy Tommy Witt, CGCS, is. Tommy is running for secretary-treasurer for the GCSAA in February at Anaheim.



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even distribution of water. Conversely, it also shows that a single row of sprinklers cannot be used to properly irrigate a fairway given today's standards because the centerline must receive an excess amount of water to keep the edges from drying out. Following the lead set by the desert regions of the country, it is likely that future irrigation systems will be designed to water from property line to property line so that superintendents can make it rain as if they were Mother Nature (if not better) whenever they so desire.

In conclusion, the management of fairways looks as though it will become as sophisticated as that for the greens. In other words, to speculate on what tomorrow's fairways will look like, take a closer look at the greens. I hope, however, that the speed of the fairways will never become an issue, as then it will be time to retire. ■

TURF TALK
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Director's Column

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We put on great monthly meetings at some of the greatest golf facilities in the world; but given the size of our organization, I do not think we do enough to promote ourselves as stewards of the community. I believe that this Vendor's Day is a way to do that. Let's give the proceeds to that needy cause.

Let's start a scholarship program that is available to ALL members' children and grandchildren. So that the market is not overrun with new superintendents, let's make it a scholarship available only to those not going into the greenskeeping business.

With the funding that Vendor's Day could provide on an annual basis, this could be a four-year scholarship valued at \$1,000 to \$2,000 per year. Applicants would be judged by an independent team of judges made up of high school counselors and university personnel. The scholarship would be renewable each year based on the recipient maintaining a "B" average. With this scholarship available to ALL members' children and grandchildren, every one in the organization would feel "more bang for the buck."

My vision of the future of this committee is to try and implement some of these ideas. I need support from my fellow commit-

tee members and the rest of the vendors. And we need the support from the rest of the membership.

I do believe that some sort of Vendor's Day in '98 will happen. The cause, the format, the logistics will need to be spelled out in detail in the near future. As you read this, please formulate your thoughts, ideas, and comments. Please feel free to drop me a line or e-mail me at cannonturf@aol.com. The committee will be meeting in January to discuss all of our options.

As I close this editorial, I would like to bestow from my family to yours a **Very Happy and Healthy Holiday Season.** ■