

# Planning for the Future: The Turfgrass Industry and the University of Illinois

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**H**ow will the turfgrass industry look in 5, 10, and 20 years from now? What will the job of a superintendent be 20 years from today? One thing we know with certainty is that change is a constant in our ever more technical society. So, we know change will occur, but our guess is that none of us can predict what that change will be.

While we can't predict the future, we can help shape it by the actions we now take. Therefore, at the University of Illinois, we have undertaken a strategic planning process to help chart the future

directions of our program. If our program was physics or mathematics, we would undoubtedly develop our plan strictly based on our internal stakeholders. However, the turfgrass program at the U of I is strongly tied to the Illinois turfgrass industry. We must include the industry in our strategic planning process.

We will work with the Illinois Turfgrass Foundation Board to get their input on how the U of I should partner with the ITF and the turf industry of Illinois. But we would like to see more involvement and input than just the elected board of the ITF. As turf managers, you can make a valuable contribution to this partnership by expressing your ideas. The "eyes" and "ears" of the Illinois turfgrass

industry are the turfgrass managers. By responding to our request for input, you can help shape the future of the Illinois turfgrass industry.

What do you want the University of Illinois turfgrass group to provide you? How can our group strengthen the turfgrass industry in Illinois? We need your ideas, your vision of how the turfgrass industry of Illinois should grow and develop so that it is a model of University/industry partnership. We truly believe that a strong University/industry partnership will add tremendous strength and visibility to our industry.

Change is occurring in the turfgrass industry. The GCSAA is becoming more involved in sup-

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## Planning for the Future: . . .

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porting University research, the United States Golf Association has developed a strong competitive research program, and state turfgrass foundations have increased their fund-raising activities.

While research is very important to advancing our industry, we must remember that universities provide several other important functions in addition to research. Undergraduate education is a very important mission of each university, and we would argue that training top-quality students is the lifeblood of the turfgrass industry. Many superintendents complain about the numbers of students training to be superintendents. How shortsighted! This is the sign of a vital, growing industry. It also creates competition, which most people agree is good for the industry.

Universities also provide continuing education, an area that may change dramatically in the future as the Internet shapes the way information is transmitted. At the University of Illinois, we currently develop and present an annual turfgrass field day, the NCTE, and Illinois-Indiana turfgrass short course. A web page was recently developed; and publications such as the "Turfgrass Tips," extension bulletins, and other written documents are all part of the U of I outreach program.

We think it is clear that the turfgrass industry will look much different 20 years from now than it does today. Where should the Illinois turfgrass industry fit in the national and international scene? Do we want to be one of the leading industries in the country? Most people would say yes to that question.

Our question to you is how do we get there from here? We want your input; you can reach us by phone, fax, or e-mail with your comments. Thank you for your help on this important project.

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## Director's Column

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groundwork was laid already; the MAGCS call letters have been reserved for us when we are ready to have our own site. This is certainly not my area of expertise, and I'm pestering pros like Nick Hongisto for help. If any other Internet surfers would care to lend their experience, please give me a call. I hope we'll be online before the season gets into full gear.

In closing, I hope 1998 is a good year for everyone. Enjoy the last little bit of the off-season, and we'll see you at the first golf event on April 27 at Schaumburg Golf Club, the annual opening scramble. ■

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