

## FEATURE II

David Marquardt, *Dirt-n-Turf Consulting*



# Economical Agronomical Thinking – Part 2

## *Labels, Marketing and More*

*This is a great time of year. Vacations are ending, yet the rush of a new season is not yet upon us. The GIS is still fresh in our minds, as is the taste of the food and the culture. Now as most of you know, I did not make the GIS this year due to heart surgery. And while I missed the food, chasing a good bottle of wine or two, and seeing so many clients and friends all in one place, the thing I may have missed most was the chance to walk the floor and look at all the 'new and improved' products on the market.*

One of my rituals is to try and get acquainted with as many of the new labels as possible so we can make educated recommendations to clients. In these many hours of strolling isles, it is always interesting to see the ingenuity of manufacturers as they strive to re-package, re-label, and re-price their fertility products. And that is the point I want to address.

As mentioned in the first article, these are some of the more difficult times we have experienced in both the golf and horticulture industries. Trickle-down economics is in full force as many courses cut back on expenses, which equates to less product bought and applied, which equates to less revenue for manufacturers, which equates to more aggressive marketing and packaging strategies. Simply put, in these more difficult times it becomes more prudent than ever to know what you're buying and just how it is affecting the overall chemistry and performance of your soil and turf.

Let's talk numbers. A recent survey, in the February 2009 issue of *Golfdom*, suggests that 34% of golf budgets have been increased, 42% of budgets remain the same, and 23% of budgets have been reduced. The same survey says that if asked to cut, 48% would first cut labor and only 7% would cut fertility. This data comes from polling 652 private, daily fee, and municipal facilities which should be a great cross-section of our industry that probably holds true to my experiences in Chicago and the Midwest. However, with increases in about every area of our expenses over the past year, it would be a safe assumption that a fairly high percentage of the 42% who held to the same budget, really have less buying power. Add this to the 23% who have had budget concessions and we are looking at 65% of the industry with reduced purchasing power.

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### *The first area of prudence comes in reading the label.*

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While these numbers are very real, they should not be cause for playing Chicken Little. Indeed the same article in *Golfdom* tells us that 56% of courses feel optimistic and 27% neutral for the upcoming year. This leaves only a handful who are pessimistic. From my experience, this is nothing new. Positive attitudes will go a long way toward swaying some of those on the pessimistic side to move on over and join the rest of us in enjoying this great sport and career.

Don't assume that fertility has to suffer because of the present financial situation. Indeed, if superintendents get a little more down and dirty, they will find that there are many ways to save money and do a great job on fertility. The first area of prudence comes in reading the label. I find it interesting that when we sit through a class and an exam for pesticide licensing, most of the time is spent reading and understanding the labels. Labels are explicit and must, by law, tell us what is in the product we are applying. Fortunately, the same is also true for fertilizer products. While labels on organic and biological products may be a bit fuzzy, typical synthetic NPK products are not. Reading and understanding these labels will tell us if the contents are indeed 'new and improved' or just re-packaged. OK, case in point:

*(continued on page 12)*

In a visit last year a superintendent was finding it a bit too expensive to apply the amount of potassium that he needed to mitigate the salts in his water. When we went to the shop to look at his inventory we discovered that instead of using SOP (0-0-50) as recommended, he had purchased a product with half as much actual potassium. He was told that the other product he had purchased also had some magnesium and a couple of percent of minor elements and was a good product. The cost for SOP is essentially the same as the product with half the rate that he had been using. Simply put, he was paying double just to get a couple percent of magnesium. KMag, which is 11.20% magnesium, is the same price as the other product and has almost three times the amount of magnesium. Similar stories can be told, especially about products containing calcium, but that is fodder for future articles.

Now the 'other' product this superintendent had been using is a very good product, new to the market, and performs very well. But performance was not the question. The question was one of affordability in applying the amount of potassium that the soil and turf needed. If this superintendent's budget was flush, and he wanted to apply twice as much of the other product that would have been fine. The problem is it wasn't. Karl Dannenberger, Ph.D. from Ohio State University, wrote a very nice article that addresses price per unit of fertility. It can be found in the same February issue of *Golfdom*. (This is obviously an issue worth reading while you're cleaning your office and preparing for spring!)

So, if item one is learning to be more aware of the labels on the products we use, then item two is to conduct trials more diligently before making mass changes to your fertility program. Time and space do not allow me to properly deal with this subject. There are many academic types that are far more adept at telling us how to set up trials. The only suggestion (and plea) I want to make is, do more homework before making major changes to your program. We run into clients regularly who have implemented a new foliar program, a new biological program, and a new minor's product, and started to treat their water all at the same time. The problem is that we now have no way to measure the results and effectiveness of the products. Before you upgrade your existing fertility program with 'new and improved' products, we recommend the following:

- Fully evaluate your present program and carefully list the pros and cons.
- Collect soil and tissue data so that you have a baseline against which to measure the trial results.
- Select sites such as nursery, putting greens, target greens, or select greens on the course for your trials. This allows you to measure your treated areas and the untreated.
- And, should you like a product you test, read the label carefully to see just what may be providing the results you are seeing. It may well be that a high shot of iron is providing the color response you are seeing, not a new and improved biological product.

...do more homework before making major changes to your program.

- And finally, repeat your testing so that you can correlate the visual response to the chemistry that is on the label.

I wouldn't want to publish results from this simple trial method, but it may well keep you from making expensive mistakes.

And finally, utilize the services of the CDGA and the Midwest Golf House. I say this as I applaud the CDGA staff for the trial work they did last year. Their work opened many an eye to the fact that there is little correlation between cost and effectiveness of fertilizer products. I would strongly suggest that you contact their staff and ask for a copy of their fall report.

It is often said that if we watch our pennies the dollars will take care of themselves. This has never been truer than it is in our present economy. In that same issue of *Golfdom*, the survey asked where superintendents would cut first if they were asked. Of the respondents, 48% said labor. Perhaps if we, as operators, become more sophisticated buyers and users of our fertility products, then we could keep an extra person employed. **-OC**



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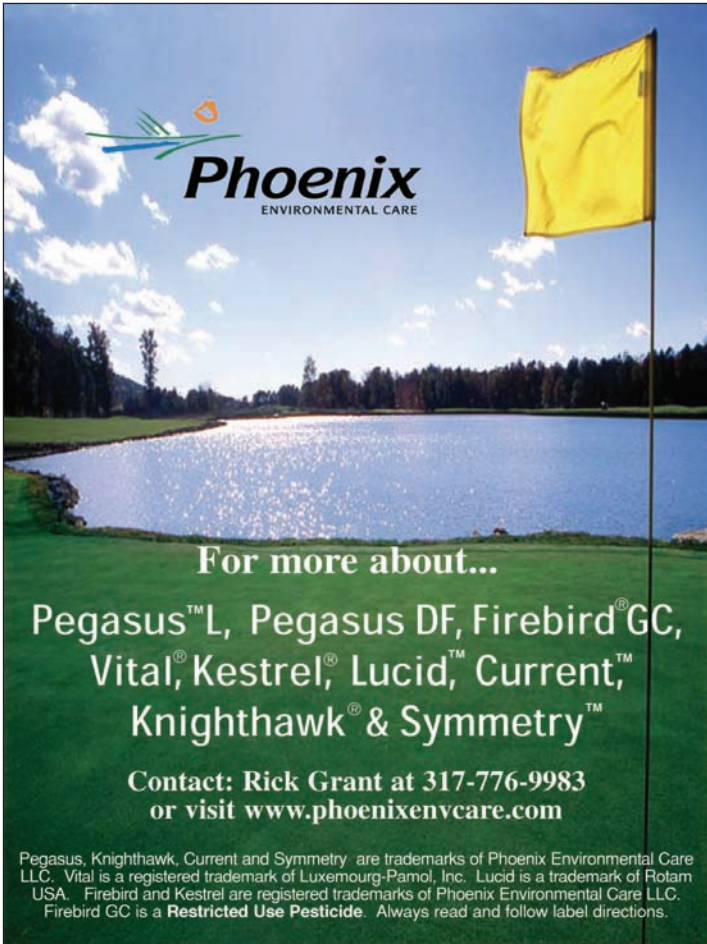
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## MIDWEST BREEZES

Charles Anfield, CGCS, Heritage Bluffs Golf Course



### “You Might Be a Golf Course Superintendent if.....”

I was looking for something “light” to help you start your year off in what is looking like a tough fiscal year for many. So I came up with this little ditty. Enjoy.

This article is kind of a play on Jeff Foxworthy’s “You Might Be a Redneck if...” comedy monologue. It’s always amazing to me that if you put a bunch of superintendents from anywhere in the country together in a room, the conversation is always the same. Whether it’s cool season or warm season turf, country club or public, we share similar stories about growing turf, golfer habits, staffing, and even our personal lives. Resemblance to any individual is purely coincidental.

You Might Be a Golf Course Superintendent if...

- Your dog is named bogey.
- Your favorite website is TGIF (Turfgrass information File).
- Your dress shoes are Dry Joy Teaching shoes.
- You only see your wife and children when it’s dark out. They think you are a vampire.
- Your favorite movie is Caddyshack.

- When you watch sports on TV, you check out the turf and mowing patterns.
- All of the books in your library are about turf diseases, landscaping, or golf course design.
- You quote memorized lines from Caddyshack in normal conversations.
- The people in your neighborhood only know you as “that grass guy”.
- All of the shirts you own have a golf course or other turf care product logos on them.
- The only magazines you subscribe to are golf or turf related.
- Your living room décor is golf memorabilia.
- You hang out with other turf nerds on your personal time.
- Your favorite day of the year is when you aerify greens.
- Your role model is a former employer/Superintendent.
- Unlike “normal” people you look forward to winter and hate summer. **-OC**



Charles Anfield

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# New Orleans '09 – Technology

*Even though attendance was down and the economy is in a rut, new technology shined brightly at the 2009 New Orleans Trade Show.*

## Precise Path

Precise Path unveiled the first robotic greensmower in the industry. Currently coupled with a Toro DPA triplex head, its HOC (Height of cut) is .062 to .297, width of cut is 21 inches, and weight is 650 pounds. The batteries last 3 hours and recharge in 8 by plugging the machine into a standard 120V AC outlet.



The 36V lead-acid battery supply is segregated; 24V for the mower operation and 12V for the software. The software is loaded onto your computer at work. You set the mowing schedule (days of week), parameters (single or double cut), direction, cleanup, and the distance it goes **after** it leaves the green before it makes its turn. Cleanup is accurate to within ½ inch.

It uses LPS (Local Positioning System) with 4 beacons that are attached to magnets that are permanently installed around the green. It has adjustable sensitivity for collision avoidance for objects on the green. Optional for owners is the programming of audible verbal warnings.

You can sign up for a demo or view one at a course near you on their website ([www.precisepath.com](http://www.precisepath.com)).

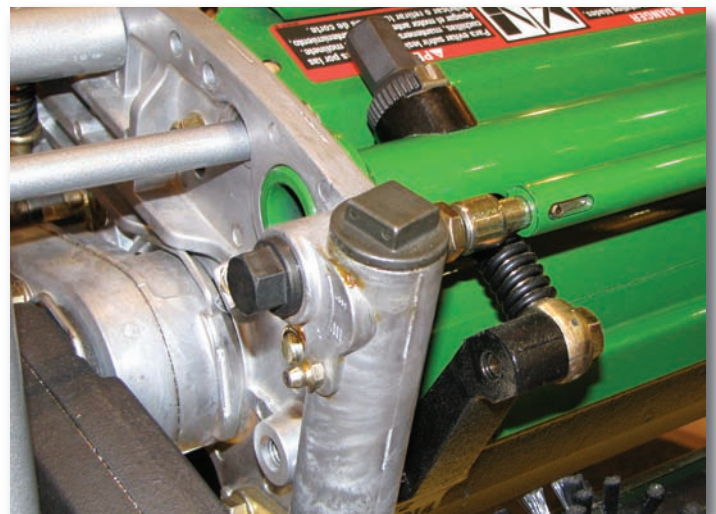
## Smithco

Smithco is always tinkering with electricity and equipment. This year they brought a sprayer with the spray pump being driven by a BIG electric motor.

## John Deere

John Deere wins the prize this year for bringing the most new toys to the show and all new reels for everything.

Dubbed the QA5 (Quick Adjust 5 inch Reel) and QA7 (Quick Adjust 7" Reel), these reels are the culmination of a redesign project that began at the Reel Cell in Horicon a few years ago. The QA5 reels come with 1-click bedknife to reel adjustment and quick adjust HOC that can be performed at the rear of the reel on either side using a 5/8 inch or 16mm socket or wrench. A shaft and worm gear adjusts both sides of the rear roller equally at the same time.



Also new are the cast aluminum side frames. The QA5 comes in 18 inch width for the 8000E fairway mower and 22 inch width for the 220E walker, 2500B, and 2500E triplex greensmowers. The 7500, 7500E, 8500 and 8500E fairway units also contain a 22 inch width. Seven and 11 blades are available.

*(continued on next page)*



The QA7 has 1-click reel to bedknife adjustment as well as the new HOC adjustment. The 22 inch reel comes with 8 or 10 blades and is for the 7700 and 8700 fairway units. The 26 and 30 inch come with 5 or 8 blades and are available on the 7200 and 2653B trim/surrounds units.

Three new fairway mowers debuted; all using electric reel motors powered by a 48 volt alternator (the same one used on the 2500E triplex mower). The 7500E and 8500E are a remake of the 2 mowers introduced last year. The 8000E is a completely different animal. Based on a triplex platform (3 wheels), it carries 5 QA5 18 inch reels with electric motors. All three tires are 24x12x12 slicks and the GRIP traction system is standard.



The 220E walker was shown at last year's show and made its official debut this time around. It has a 22 inch QA5 11 blade reel powered by an electric motor. It has a fully floating head, adjustable FOC (frequency of clip) and onboard backlapping.

### Solar Drive

These guys came up with a solar panel that can be retrofitted to most electric golf cars and utility vehicles. It charges while the vehicle is outside.

### Jacobsen

The fruits of Jacobsen's labor showed off in work done behind the scenes. A \$1.5 million investment in a special grinding process gives reels a total run-out of .0015 and puts 45° relief on each blade. Whether you prefer backlapping or grinding only, the relief will last much longer. All new reels made come with this new grinding process.

New aerating tines were also unveiled, the DuraTine™ XL and XLT Series. With special alloys, a proprietary heat treating process and special coating, Jacobsen says these tines last

4 times longer than their original ones and up to 75% longer than the competition.

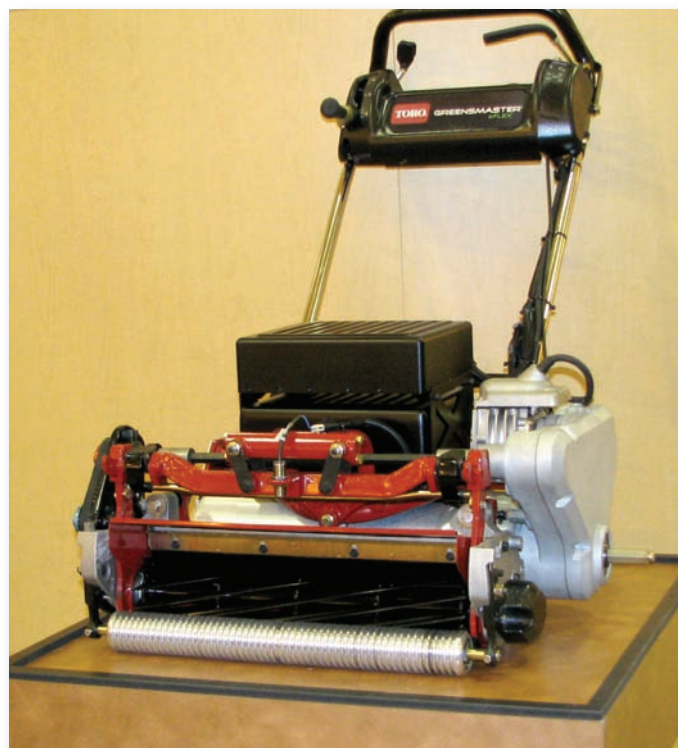
The Eclipse 322 triplex, which debuted last year, is now available for order.

### Turfco

They introduced the 3-Point TriWave seeder last year; this year they brought a walker. Independent floating seeder heads. They also introduced a programmable topdresser, the Wide-Spin 1540.

### Toro

The E-Flex made its debut. A lithium-ion battery powers the unit; giving it the capability to mow 6 greens with a single cut. A sensor on the front slows the unit down at the end of a pass for easier turning. It comes with the 14 blade reel. The projected release date is sometime in 2010.



The hybrid triplex was shown in a dimly lit room, no cameras allowed. Electric reel motors. A cast aluminum segmented floor that swings out of the way to gain easy access to the center unit. Cutting units are 5 inches off the ground in transport position, now making it easy to check the height of cut. The yoke assemblies and carrier pull frames that are a hallmark of Toro triplexes are gone. Now in place are new cast aluminum yokes attached to the reels by 2 quick release tabs. This will also come with the 14 blade reels. They currently plan on showing it to the public in San Diego next year, with a possible release date of late 2010.

Wireless hour meters are now available that sync with Toro's MyTurf equipment maintenance software. Used in conjunction with a base station, they can record the hours automatically.



## Actioneco



The guys from Finland brought their mower, the "ONE". Lithium-ion battery pack that lasts 7-8 hours. Plug in the wall recharging. Auto HOC and FOC. Auto clipping dispersal. No steering wheel, no pedals. AC servo motor drives. One hand joystick operation. Programmable control systems via satellite antenna with Finland. A 4 wheel fairway unit with 5 or 7 cutting units and a walker are scheduled to be released later this year.

-OC

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## THE BULL SHEET

John Gurke, CGCS, Associate Editor



# March 2009

MAGCS extends a warm welcome to the new members who have recently joined:

**Michael Paciga**, Class C, Biltmore Country Club  
**Juan Acosta**, Class C, Makray Memorial Golf Club

If you are a Class A member, you probably received a letter from **Jason Funderburg** and **Jeff VerCautren** of Rich Harvest Farms requesting volunteers for the Solheim Cup. A follow-up email was sent out on February 10th to clarify the dates of the event, which this item will also do. The Solheim Cup, which is the women's version of the Ryder Cup, will pit 12 of the top Ladies European Tour players against 12 of the LPGA's best in a match play format. The international event will take place from August 20th through the 23rd, and any help you can offer will be greatly appreciated. The letter came with an application form—please fill it out and get it back to Jason Funderburg by April 1st. The address is: Rich Harvest Farms, PO Box 610, Sugar Grove, IL, 60554. Several of our members are in the news with big goings-on recently. **John Leibold**, President of Leibold Irrigation announced the formation of a new company called ProGro Inc., and will serve as its president as well. The company will be focused and positioned to manufacture and distribute products and services for the professional turf, tree, and landscape markets. ProGro has purchased the assets and trademark Eco Agronomic programs of Bull Market Turf & Ornamental, Inc. from former owner and president **Aaron Goy**, who will retain equity ownership in the firm and serve as its Managing Partner responsible for sales and operations. Also joining the ProGro sales team this month is **Rusty Stachlewitz**, formerly of The Lawn Institute. Best of luck to these gentlemen in their exciting new endeavor.

### DATES TO REMEMBER

March 7 – CDGA Directors Workshop at Medinah Country Club, **Curtis Tyrrell, CGCS** host.

March 11 – CAGCS Annual Chicagoland Forum at Naperville Country Club, **Tim Anderson, CGCS** host.

March 11-12 – Reinders 19th Turf & Irrigation Conference at the Waukesha Expo Center in suburban Milwaukee, WI.

March 15 – Deadline for applications for the Par Aide Joseph S. Garske Collegiate Grant awards.

March 19 – MAGCS Computer Camp – College of DuPage, **Luke Cella, CGCS**

March 25 – MAGCS monthly meeting at Midwest Golf House in Lemont, IL, **Dr. Derek Settle, Keith Rincker** and **Chris Painter** hosts.

March 31 – Deadline for GCSAA's Student Essay Contest applications.

April 28 – MAGCS Annual Spring Scramble and monthly meeting at Prairie Landing Golf Club, President **Tony Kalina** host.

May 9 – North American Birdwatching Open held on International Migratory Bird Day. More info on this will be forthcoming.

May 18 – MAGCS/ITF Spring Golf Day at Merit Club, **John Nelson** host.

May 19 – CAGCS monthly meeting at the Glen View Club, **Tony Frandria** host.



*Rusty Stachlewitz*

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