South Florida Sunshine

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To properly equip a new 18-hole golf course, one can easily spend upwards of $200,000. Some of this equipment will need to be supplemented within a two-year period and much of it phased to back up or second line equipment within four to five years. Certain items if properly maintained (tractors, trucks, utility vehicles & sprayers), will remain front line equipment for five to 10 years, but most other turf equipment will need to be replaced or supplemented within that four to five years. During this time the equipment begins to need minor repairs that become an expense after the first year warranty is completed. As the equipment grows increasingly older, minor repairs become major repairs, more parts must be purchased, mechanics' labor is increased, operator furstration is increased, and efficiency is lost.

At some point in time, it becomes economically unfeasible to continue to repair existing equipment and new equipment must be purchased. As Golf Course Superintendents, we are also equipment managers and must be able to determine and advise management when this point occurs.

If we are to be able to properly determine when to repair or replace equipment, we need to keep accurate records. An accountant can accurately judge when an item is an expense, or how to depreciate a capital improvement item. By the same token, we should be able to reflect to management that a particular piece of equipment is costing so many dollars to repair on an annual basis. We are not talking about preventative maintenance, but rather about parts and labor for repairs. Therefore, it becomes somewhat of an accounting determination after a piece of equipment reaches a certain level of repair maintenance.For example, a greensmower at the end of three years may need $800 worth of parts and labor during the next year to keep in A-1 condition and possibly $950 the subsequent year. It may be in excellent condition and may have a life of six to seven years. However, from an accounting standpoint, it may be better to replace it after four or five years. One thing to consider is that $800 or $950 in a given year for repairs will be mostly eliminated when a new piece of machinery is purchased. Any parts problems in the first year are covered by warranty, and except for some troubleshooting by the mechanic for minor repair problems the end of the year expense is minimal. Accurate parts and labor expense on each item of equipment must be kept and this information will assist in presenting justification for new equipment purchases. If a piece of equipment is costing you $1,000 a year in labor and material, this figure is nearly eliminated with the purchase of new equipment.

One area that can be easily overlooked is labor for repairs to equipment. Labor cannot strictly be figured on the time it takes to replace a part. We must consider the time a mechanic takes to troubleshoot on the course, time to tow or haul the equipment to the maintenance area, diagnosis of the problem, finding the proper repair part, ordering a new part and ultimately replacement and testing. If all this time is figured at $7 to $10 per hour, it is easy to see how equipment repair cost adds up quickly.

Parts prices are another area that deserves a great deal of attention in figuring costs on a year to year basis. Turf equipment parts are increasing at an alarming rate of 12 to 15% annually. Some parts have increased 25 to 30% annually! This has caused many superintendents to shop for comparable replacement parts. There are several companies that manufacture replacement parts for turf equipment and most are looked upon quite favorably by superintendents as another alternative to an already limited market. It does not make much sense to spend a great deal more for bearings, oil filter seals, engine parts, hoses, etc. when these items are available from specialty companies. In addition, there are a few companies who manufacture or supply many of the gears, reels, bedknives, rollers, etc. at greatly reduced prices.

Parts availability and service is another question put to many local superintendents and, for the most part, there has been a general feeling of satisfaction and a marked improvement in these areas over the past few years in the South Florida area. The area turf distributors have been very cooperative in expediting parts deliveries.

Equipment prices, on the other hand, have been a sore spot with most superintendents. Prices have risen annually at 15 to 20% for most turf equipment and 20 to 25% annually for the past two years for some other equipment. This becomes rather difficult for clubs to handle financially when salaries, greens fees, cart rentals and dues at golf courses have not gone up by the same margin. Most superintendents feel trapped when increases like this occur because competition in many areas of the turf industry is minimal. There are limited choices for turf equipment. Distribution is done in regions that require golf courses to buy from certain distributors. Supply and demand in most of the turf industry sort of goes like this, "You've got it and I have to have it." I do not know where competition and "fairness," as one superintendent put it, enter into the picture, but I hope the turf equipment manufacturers can get their act togther and help us maintain a level of price increase that is tolerable and realistic. If we cannot present conditions to our golfers that they expect for a reasonable cost, then the entire industry will lose ground instead of gain. ■

Agronomy Quiz

Match the following:

1. ____ Blade
2. ____ Xylem
3. ____ Grass
4. ____ Herbicide
5. ____ Sheath
6. ____ Blend
7. ____ Phloem
8. ____ Overseed
9. ____ Evapotranspiration
10. ____ Internode

A. The principal food conduction elements of vascular plants.

B. The flattened portion of the leaf located above the sheath.

C. To seed onto an existing turf with temporary cool season grass.

D. Total loss of moisture through the process of evaporation.

E. Any plant of the family gamineae.

F. A pesticide used for controlling weeds.

G. A combination of two or more cultivars of a single turfgrass species.

H. Portion of the stem between two successive nodes.

I. The principal water conducting element in vascular plants.

J. The tubular basal portion of the leaf that encloses the stem.

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NOTES:

Try this new alternative to using pin position indicators (whiffle balls on flagpoles). Use red, white and yellow colored flags. Red is used in the front third of the green, white in the middle and yellow in the back. The cupcutter takes one extra flag and pole with him in the morning and takes the old flag and pole to each successive green. It's not as much of a problem as you would think, avoids having whiffle balls that slip on the pole, and is very appealing to the golfers. It also greatly reduces theft. For some reason, vandals do not particulary care for numberless flags. Without exageration, we have reduced our flag theft by 80% over the past year! ■

ANSWERS TO AGRONOMY QUIZ

Answers:
1. B 2. I 3. E 4. F 5. J 6. G 7. A 8. C
9. D 10. H