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FLORIDA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE

GOLF TURF NEWS

Value of Golf Turf to Florida

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According to the National Golf Foundation (NGF), Florida leads the nation in the number of new golf courses constructed. Since 1980, the number of new courses opened has ranged between 25 and 30 annually. During the same period, ongoing golf projects, when combining openings, planning, construction, and prospects, have numbered 75 to 80 annually. These numbers are approximately double those of Florida's nearest rival, California. This in itself is indicative of the value of the golfing industry in the state, but just how valuable is it? This issue of GOLF TURF NEWS addresses this question. Such information may be of value in defending the existence of golf courses.

The NGF reported there were 751 golf courses in Florida on January 1, 1983. Their types and numbers were:

Eighteen hole regulation courses	**488**
Nine hole regulation courses	**91**
Eighteen hole executive courses	**82**
Nine hole executive courses	**29**
Eighteen hole par three courses	**10**
Nine hole par three courses	**41**
Total courses	*751*

A survey conducted by the Everglades Chapter of the Florida Golf Course Superintendent's Association in 1983 showed the following profile for eighteen hole regulation and executive courses:

	REGULATION GOLF COURSES
Acreage	**145 acres per course**
Maintenance cost	**$306,000 per course annually**
Employees	**10 per course**
Rounds of golf	**45,000 per course annually**

	EXECUTIVE GOLF COURSES
Acreage	**54 acres per course**
Maintenance cost	**$156,000 per course annually**
Employees	**5 per course**
Rounds of golf	**45,000 per course annually**

Although no statistics are available, nine hole courses probably operated about one-half the level and occupy about one-half the land as their 18 hole counterparts. Par three courses are probably about two-thirds the equivalent of an executive course. All host approximately the same number of rounds (45,000 annually). Thus the estimated totals for all golf courses in the state are as follows:

Total acreage	**83,667**
Total maintenance cost	**$176,927,000 annually**
Total number of employees	**5,934**
Total rounds of golf	**33,795,000 annually**

These are impressive figures, but they represent only the tip of the golf-value iceberg. For example, golf course maintenance represents only about one-half the cost of operating the total golf facility i. e. clubhouse, locker rooms, pro shop, restaurants, lounges, etc. The 751 courses in Florida are included in 642 different facilities.

Thus, approximately $156,000,000 additionally are generated for a grand total of $332,927,000 to operate and maintain the "golf factories" in Florida. The number of employees must also be adjusted upwards to a total of approximately 10,000 for the 642 facilities. Data on how many other persons make all or a portion of their living by supplying goods and services to golf facilities are not available, but conservatively, they probably number in the thousands.

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Land values of golf course vary due to location, but generally courses are situated on some of the most desirable land in given location. The area around them is usually highly developed as either homes, condominiums or resorts. As such, the course itself and surrounding area are most often considered high price real estate and carried on the tax rolls as such. Using a very conservative $3000 per acre assessment value for golf courses, the total comes to $251,001,000 for tax purposes. This figure would have to be adjusted downward to account for the fact the approximately ten percent (74 out of 751) of the golf courses in the state are publicly owned and not subject to property taxes. However, this adjustment is more than offset by the additional taxes generated by the value of the total golf facility. Simply stated the taxpayers of Florida benefit greatly from the property taxes paid by privately-owned golf facilities.

The golfing public is the ultimate consumer of the services provided by the golfing facilities. The 1983 NGF golfer profile survey showed that the median expenditure for golfers in the Southeastern United States was $1280 annually. This cost included green fees and/or dues, equipment, cart rental, clothing and shoes, but not transportation, or meals and beverage consumed while on golf outings. The 1983 edition of FLORIDA STATISTICAL ABSTRACTS (FSA), published by the University of Florida, showed the resident population of Florida to be 10.4 million, 17.3 percent of which played golf. Therefore, based on these figures, there were approximately 1.8 million resident golfers who, assuming median expenditures, spent 2.3 billion dollars a year on golf. In addition to the resident golfer, Florida hosts several million non-resident ones. According to FSA, 39.3 million tourists came to Florida in 1982 and 11.3 percent played golf while here. But, of more significance, 6.2 to 8.7 percent, depending on the mode of transportation, came specifically to play golf in the sunshine state, i. e., a golfing vacation. How much money did these golfing tourists spend? No precise figures are available, but, according to FSA, the 39.3 million tourists spent 21.5 billion dollars. Assuming the golfing tourists spent their prorata share, and using the lower 6.2 percent figure, this comes to over 1.3 billion dollars spent by tourists on golfing vacations in Florida.

The foregoing gives some idea of the economic impact of golf on Florida's economy. The statistics used are well documented and our interpretation of them is conservative. However, it should be noted they are for the years 1982-83. Because of the lack of documentation, we have not speculated on the impact of golf on the construction and real estate industries. However, in Florida, "golf-front" views with waterfront are the most desireable property for residential and investment purposes.

One final note, in the Southeastern United States, NGF found that over 60 percent of the golfers are either retired, students or homemakers. The less than 40 percent that are employed have a median income of $33,000. This profile is hardly that of the "idle rich" that many ill-informed individuals perceive golfers to be.

IFAS has responded to the needs of this large industry through its research and extension efforts. Research programs have identified and focused on many areas including new cultivar evaluation, water quality and quantity, and pesticide use evaluation. Extension programs have ranged from state-wide efforts to local chapter meeting seminars. As the industry continues to grow, one of the roles of IFAS will be to maintain a dialogue to identify current needs and assess ongoing projects that directly relate to the golf turf industry. ■