

# Lean times for bluegrass sod growers, survey finds

By Peter Blais

Bluegrass sod growers are generally finding themselves in the same doldrums bedeviling most of the sod industry.

"There's a direct correlation between housing starts and sod sales," said Doug Fender, executive director of the American Sod Producers Association. "Until the housing market turns around, the sod market will be a tough go."

Existing sod farms expanded and new farms cropped up during the economic boom of the early- and mid-1980s. Sod acreage grew.

When the economy hit the skids at the tail end of the last decade, so did the sod market. While results of next year's U.S. Department of Agriculture census may show an increase in the number of bluegrass sod acres, Holmes suspects much of that land is being planted in pumpkins, watermelons and the like until the housing market rights itself.

With demand down and supplies up, the cost of bluegrass sod has fallen 10 to 25 percent from a year ago in most parts of the country, according to Mike Holmes, general manager of Warren's Turf Nursery in Crystal Lake, Ill. Meanwhile, production costs have remained basically the same because of the 2-to-1 fixed-to-variable cost ratio in the sod business, he added.

Prices in the Chicago area are off 15 to 20 percent, Holmes said. California is down 20 percent and New England and New York 15 to 25 percent, he estimated.

Occasional pockets of prosperity exist where prices have remained the same or even escalated.

Texas, which went into and came out of the recession earlier than most of the country, has seen sod prices triple, Holmes said. Omaha and Lincoln, Neb., along with much of the Pacific Northwest have remained strong, added Fender. And Iowa, where the droughts of 1988 and 1989 ruined much of the local bluegrass crop, is importing bluegrass sod, according to Iowa State University horticulture Professor Nick Christians.

But rising prices are the exception and falling ones the rule in most of the nation. That's good news for U.S. superintendents, who can buy a square foot of bluegrass sod from a high of about 24 cents in California to a low of 10 cents in the Midwest, Holmes estimated.

Bluegrass' major assets are its fast-growing rhizomes that allow the turf to repair itself quickly and its dark green color. The large number of bluegrass sod farms

also means "no course should be more than 150 to 200 miles from a producer of golf course-quality turf," Fender said. That makes refrigerated trucks to transport turf unnecessary and helps hold prices

down.

Its major liabilities are its susceptibility to disease when watered and fertilized heavily under low-cut conditions and thick blades that are more difficult to swing through than

many other grasses.

Bluegrass remains popular in the rough areas of many cool-season and transition zone courses. The thick-bladed grass is also common in fairways, but is being pushed by

new varieties of bentgrass, fescues and ryes, especially at high-priced facilities, Christians said.

"Bluegrass is used primarily in the roughs around here," said Dennis Parker, GCSAA President Steve

## Survey of major bluegrass sod growers

Company Address Contact person Phone no. Circle no.	Mono-culture	Bluegrass variety	Blend	No. of bluegrasses	Mixture	Other turf types	At-farm price (cents/sf)	Harvestable acres	Soil type	Region served	Years in business
<b>Bluegrass Lawn Farms</b> 262 Red Lion Rd. Vincentown, N.J. 08088 April Lee Anderson 609-859-2224 Circle #201			x	3-5	x	Fescue	Varies Varies	800	Sandy, loam, heavy	Mid-Atlantic	31
<b>D.A. Hoerr &amp; Sons</b> 8020 Shade Tree Dr. Peoria, Ill. 61615 Jack Hoerr 309-691-4561 Circle #202			x	4			10	600	Silt loam	Ill.	65
<b>De Lallo Sod Farms</b> 652 Deer Park Ave. Dix Hills, N.Y. 11746 Len De Lallo 800-426-4763 Circle #203			x	4	x	Fescue, Rye	17-18 17-18	1,400	Haven sandy loam & riverhead loam	N.Y.C., CT, N.J.	31
<b>Eastside Nursery</b> P.O. Box 127 Groveport, Ohio 43125 Richard Wilson 614-836-9800 Circle #204			x	3			Varies	1,500	Mineral	Ohio	45
<b>Fairwood Turf Farm</b> 12307 Annapolis Rd. Glenn Dale, Md. 20769 Eugene B. Roberts 301-390-6212 Circle #205			x	4	x	Fescue	12 12	500	Loam, clay, sand	D.C., Md.	25
<b>Foxcroft Meadows</b> 5402 Edgewood Rd. Crystal Lake, Ill. 60012 John Barchard 815-459-3322 Circle #206			x	4-5			9	550	Loam-muck	Chicago	32
<b>Green Valley Turf Farms</b> 7472 Akron-Canfield Rd. Canfield, Ohio 44406 Jeff Ham 800-535-7882 Circle #207			x	5	x	Rye	9.5 9.5	1,000	Clay loam	Pa., N.J.	24
<b>H &amp; E Sod Nursery</b> 3900 W. 167th St. Markham, Ill. 60426 Dale Habenicht 708-596-7200 Circle #208			x x	6 5			9.5 8.5	1,950	Sandy loam, silt, clay loam, peat	Ill., Ind., Wis.	44
<b>Huber Ranch Sod Nursery</b> P.O. Box 188, 23002 Wicker Ave. Schneider, Ind. 46376 John Huber 219-552-0552 Circle #209			x	5			11	760	Sandy	Midwest	25
<b>Jade Run Sod Farm of Delaware</b> P.O. Box 216, High St. Ext. Bethel, Del. 19931 Dan LaCates 301-875-7505 Circle #210				x	3 x	Fescue	10 10.5	300	Sandy loam	Va., Md., Del.	2
<b>Jade Run Turf &amp; Sod Farm</b> P.O. Box 2536 Vincentown, N.J. 08088-0425 Samuel Alloway 609-859-2400 Circle #211			x	3	x	Fescue	10 10.5	600	Sandy loam	N.Y., N.J., Pa., Del.	25
<b>L. DeLea &amp; Sons Sod</b> 444 Elwood Rd. East Northport, N.Y. 11740 Vincent Sasso 516-368-8022 Circle #212			x	4	x	Tall fescue	N/A N/A	1,300	Sandy loam	N.Y., N.J., Conn.	63
<b>Mueller Farms Sod Nursery</b> 26W 258 Lake St. Ontarioville, Ill. 60103 Nick Henrici 708-837-8210 Circle #213			x	5			11	650	Sandy, peat	Chicago	72
<b>Pacific Sod</b> 820 Flynn Rd. Camarillo, Calif. 93012 Bill Tavener 805-987-8456 Circle #214			x	3	x	Rye	Varies Varies	300	Sandy to heavy loam	Calif., Nev.	25+



Cadenelli's assistant at Metedeconk National Golf Club in Jackson, N.J. "Some courses still use a lot of bluegrass. But most of the new ones are going to bentgrass."

"We use it around the fringes of the tees," said Vincent Sasso, manager of Louis DeLea & Sons, Inc., an East Northport, N.Y. sod farm, and owner of a nearby golf course.

"It's too thick to use elsewhere. You can't mow it down low enough."

While new proprietary varieties that are more disease-resistant and shade-tolerant are constantly being

developed, some of the common varieties are making a comeback, Christians said. Among them are South Dakota Common, Ken Blue and Argyle.

"They go into dormancy quicker, but they also come out quicker," the Iowa State researcher said. "And they often require less maintenance."

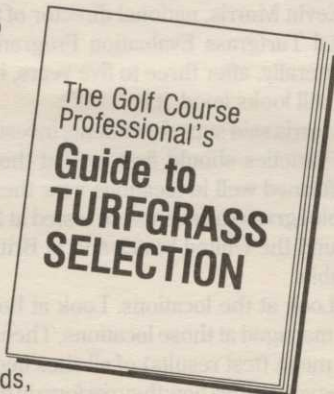
Company Address Contact person Phone no. Circle no.	Mono-culture	Bluegrass variety	Blend	No. of bluegrasses	Mixture	Other turf types	At-farm price (cents/sf)	Harvestable acres	Soil type	Region served	Years in business
<b>Pine Island Turf Nursery</b> 29 Ruth Dr. Sussex, N.J. 07461 Chip Lain 201-875-5125 Circle #215			x	2-4	x	Tall fescue, Rye	10.5 10.5	650	Organic & organic loam	Metro N.Y., N.J., Pa., Conn.	28
<b>Reed's Sod Farm</b> RD1, Box 2009, Rt. 539 Allentown, N.J. 08501 Stuart Reed 609-259-0775 Circle #216			x	5	x	Tall fescue	11.5-12 9.5-10	1,000+	Sandy loam	Pa., N.Y., N.J.	30+
<b>Reid Sod Farm</b> 812 Hwy 33 East Freehold, N.J. 07728 David Reid 908-431-4466 Circle #217			x	4			13	600	Sandy loam	N.J., Staten Island	20
<b>Shamrock Turf Nurseries</b> 13288 S. S.R. 39 Hanna, Ind. 46340 Cliff Guse 219-797-2215 Circle #218			x	4			N/A	700	Mineral, black sand, muck	Ind., Ill.	31
<b>Tuckahoe Turf Farms</b> 15 University Rd. Canton, Mass. 02021 Chris Beasley 800-556-6985 Circle #219					x x	Jamestown fescue Rye, Fescue	16 16	N/A	Sandy loam	N. England, East. N.Y.	20
<b>Virginia Beef</b> 1215 James Madison Hwy. Haymarket, Va. 22069 William Brockett 703-754-8873 Circle #220			x	5			9.5	3,000	Silty loam	Mid-Atlantic	26
<b>Warren's Turf</b> 7502 S. Main St. Crystal Lake, Ill. 60014 Herb Hadley 800-435-6144 Circle #221	x	A-34 Benson	x	3-5			12-28 Varies	3,000+	All types	N'East, M'West, TX, CA	N/A
<b>Winding Brook Turf Farm</b> 240 Griswold Rd. Wethersfield, Conn. Donald Grant 203-529-6869 Circle #222			x	6	x	Chewings fescue	16 16	800	Sandy loam, silt loam	New England	32

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