

Seed companies victimized by the double squeeze



Hal Phillips,
editor

Pity the seed companies doing business in Oregon's grass belt. They're getting squeezed and superintendents may well see higher ryegrass prices as a result.

For the better part of two years, we've been reporting on the advent of purchasing groups — courses which have pooled their buying power to negotiate lower prices on products, like grass seed. These groups buy in bulk, so while sales are steady and voluminous, seed company margins take a hit on the top end.

Now many perennial ryegrass growers — the farmers who sell their product to seed companies — have organized a bargaining association and instituted floor prices (see story on page 1). For seed companies, this hurts margins on the bottom end.

It's called feeling the pinch of tighter margins at both ends of the marketplace.

"The price is going up. No doubt about that. People in the golf course market should know that," explained Mike Robinson, Seed Research of Oregon president. "And it's not only because of the bargaining association — it's because of supply and demand.

"There has been a shortage around the world of perennial ryegrass, and seed companies have been getting a little more money this year. But we may be facing a huge crop this year. If we have a bumper crop and prices don't go down, we won't see a price hike until next spring."

Bob Richardson, president and general manager of Great Western Seed, said the increase will come this fall. He also believes the Perennial Ryegrass Bargaining Association may well signal a new era in seed economics. "Initially we're going to see it in ryegrass," he said. "But if these guys are successful — and they are very well positioned to be successful — I can foresee a fescue bargaining association popping up in the near future."

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Through the wonder of the Turfgrass Information Network (TGIF) and Turfbyte, *Golf Course News* has been on-line for sometime. But we finally have our own e-mail address:

hphillip@gcn.biddeford.com.

For you superintendents, managers, architects and builders with one foot firmly planted in the 21st century, anyone at *Golf Course News* — Charles von Brecht, Mark Leslie, Bob Sanner,

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Some bureaucrats can't see the issues for the red tape

A friend of ours owns a farm in rural Maine. One day she walked out into her yard to find a coyote standing in the driveway eyeing her dog, who was hitched. The coyote had just killed a sheep, was drooling blood, and may have had rabies since he was already eyeing his next kill and he was out in the open in daylight. A lady jogger running by saw the coyote, crossed to the other side of the street and hollered over, "Patty, don't you know about our leash laws?"

Consumed by an **apparent** violation of a minor law, that woman entirely missed a real danger.

Do you ever wonder if the same thing is going through the minds of certain bureaucrats?

Do you sometimes wonder if they are talking without thinking and regulating with no common sense whatever?

It was, after all, EPA Administrator Carol Browner who described her job as "... protecting the health of the people of this country and the health of the resources we all share — the air and the land and the water." She was doing fine until she added, "But I can't do my job if the people of this country don't have health care." Say, what?

This all comes to mind because of the case of *Pennington Enterprises, Inc. versus the United States of America* (see page 61). Pennington was absolutely and foolishly wronged by a bureaucrat — supported by other bureaucrats — costing the seed company \$250,000 and a half dozen other companies another \$750,000. Sonny Pennington was the only one to take on the government, fully knowing the long road ahead. And he was indeed prophetic on June 9, 1989, when he said, "The government's got thousands of attorneys on salary who can drag the thing out forever," and added, "I can sue and possibly win \$250,000 and it will cost me \$200,000."

Indeed, some 2,200 days later, the U.S. Treasury has paid Pennington \$250,000 for his losses, plus interest. There was no compensation for the \$170,000 in lawyers' fees that



Mark Leslie,
managing editor

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OBITUARY

Dr. William H. Daniel, 75

WEST LAFAYETTE, Ind. — Dr. William H. Daniel, Purdue University professor emeritus, died Feb. 24 in St. Elizabeth Hospital medical center, where he had been a patient one day.

Dr. Daniel, 75, retired in 1985 after working 35 years at the Department of Agronomy. One of the leaders in developing the International Turfgrass Society, he pioneered research and educational methods in turfgrass management and developed the PURR-Wick Water Management System and Prescription Athletic Turf (PAT).

He is survived by his widow, Gwen, a son and two daughters.

Memorial funds may be sent to the Daniel Scholarship Fund, Department of Agronomy, Purdue University, or the Endowment Fund of the Federated Church here.

Letters

PBI/GORDON SETS THE RECORD STRAIGHT

To the editor:

PBI/Gordon Corp. wishes to correct any misconception concerning the quality of SCAG mowers that may have been generated by our 1995 Embark Lite advertising campaign, "Get the turf management tool that works when you can't!"

The campaign is based on the testimonial of Scott Hall, president of Classic Landscape, Inc. of Frederick, Md. According to Mr. Hall, Classic Landscape uses Embark Lite as a "tool" in his business, i.e. the plant-growth regulator (PGR) keeps turf growth from getting out of hand when schedule delays might otherwise be experienced.

The makers of SCAG mowers felt that the mention of inevitable "mower breakdowns" in an ad which pictures one of their machines might cause the industry to perceive the mower in a negative way.

In fact, Scott Hall has used SCAG mowers for several years and is proud of all the tools he has selected for use in his business. A sprayer, a string trimmer, a blower, a PC unit and a jug of Embark Lite, all the property of Classic Landscape, are

also displayed in the ad.

We hope no one thinks that we intended to imply that any of these items are of inferior quality. After all, Embark Lite is a quality tool, so it was our intention to feature the product among other quality turf management tools.

I would also like to state that the ad is not intended to imply endorsement of Embark Lite by any of the equipment manufacturers whose products are pictured. We understand that many manufacturers feel that PGRs are in competition with them. It's really too bad, because PGRs can't replace mowing and trimming, but they can save wear and tear on equipment and help contractors and managers with scheduling.

Hal Dickey
Director of Advertising
PBI/Gordon Corp.
Kansas City, Mo.

TDD TAKES ISSUE WITH 'TRUCE'

To the editor:

I saw the "Truce" in bold print on the front page of the April edition of *GCN* in regard to the relationship between the USGA and the current physical evaluation laboratories supporting the 1993 USGA Guidelines. I was

confused, because in order to have a truce, you first have to have a "War" and at best Mr. [Jim] Snow's fear was only the need to deal with the potential of angry lab technicians. But I am sure that the mob of Green Section personnel that was in attendance would have gallantly protected Mr. Snow. However, I can't fault *GCN* for the tone-setting header of the article because, as Mr. Stossel was quoted in Mark Leslie's column in April's edition, it sells newspapers.

The meeting that the USGA set up in San Francisco with the American Association of Laboratory Accreditation was in no small way historic. The USGA deserves credit for taking a major step forward in resolving the controversy over the qualifications of the laboratories that protect the integrity of the 1993 USGA Guidelines.

It was clear to me that there was no opposition to the requirement for accreditation of the laboratories and there will probably be a list of accredited labs by the 1997 GCSAA show. However, please let me clarify the somewhat less than optimistic picture of the accreditation process that was attributed to me.

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