

Here's the poop: Fertilizer business is really hopping



Hal Phillips,
editor

You only need to hit me over the head three, maybe four times before I begin to sense something is afoot. I speak of the fertilizer industry, where big things are happening. To wit:

- East recently met west when **Pursell Industries** of Sylacauga, Ala., entered into an alliance with **J.R. Simplot** of Pocatello, Idaho, to manufacture fertilizers for the turfgrass, nursery, consumer and agriculture markets. Pursell, best known for its controlled-release product, Polyon, has supplied fertilizers to Simplot for 10 years. Simplot is known for its phosphate fertilizers marketed under the Best and Apex labels, aimed somewhat to the turf industry, but mostly to agricultural and retail markets. This new agreement makes both firms national players, giving them the strength to compete with newly rejuvenated...

- **Vigoro Corp.**, which has overhauled its ParEx brand line with new management, manufacturing arrangements, public stock offerings and market emphases. "I think you're being kind if you say there has been a decline in the impact of ParEx over the past two years," said Ron Gagne, Vigoro's new vice president and general manager of the firm's Professional Products Unit. "We have created a separate division with separate manufacturing facilities for the turf business. That explains some of the reorganization." Gagne comes to Vigoro from competitor O.M. Scott. Indeed, Gagne reports to another former Scott employee, Senior Vice President Ken Holbrook, prompting a few industry wags to call the new regime, "O.M. Vigoro." Alas, Vigoro has also hired a new chief financial officer for its Pro unit, Jay Ferguson, and he's not from Marysville, Ohio. He's a 20-year veteran of General Electric. Look for Vigoro to debut its new slow-release nitrogen nutrient, IBDU, early next year. Also look for the firm to concentrate on selling to the management companies with larger course portfolios.

- When it comes to models, you could do worse than **O.M. Scott**, the fertilizer giant which continues to capitalize on its double brand equity. Consumers know Scott, as do superintendents. Scott's title sponsorship of the Senior PGA Tour's Tradi-

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Living long and prospering in the golf course universe

'The *Star Ship Enterprise*, going places where no one has ever gone before." Fast-forward that film, please, to the new series. Yes. That's it: "Golf Ship Enterprise, taking golf to places it has never gone before."

Can you hear *Star Trek* originator Gene Roddenberry now? I can ... almost. Because it is true: Even this late in history, citizens of Golf Nation are taking the game to parts of this earth where not even those Scots of old had introduced it.

No, not everyone in the world plays golf. In fact, not everyone even knows what in the world golf is. In some places folks are just happy if they know what **food** is; their minds are otherwise occupied than with this game. For them, it could be far more than a game. It could be food in their mouths.

In the Dominican Republic, golf course architect Pete Dye is the Man Who Could Be King. The Teeth of the Dog and Links courses he designed at Casa de Campo, built in 1971 and 1976, have brought employment to many.

Jobs, jobs, jobs ... as well as sport, sport, sport. We just need a few more crewmen aboard *Golf Ship Enterprise*.

There were heroes of the past who hot-trotted the globe with visions of golf courses on topographical maps rolled under their arms. Their numbers are legion, and some of them are legend. They took golf wherever they could find the land and the equipment to build a few holes: From Alister Mackenzie and C.H. Alison to Peter Thomson and Robert Trent Jones Sr.

But they didn't reach every nook and cranny. And today the heroes of this tradition may even come from the masses — the dedicated masses of people who want to share the experience golf has given them with others.

Let's take a quick look at one such person, my Maine main example: Dr. Steve Polackwich. An 80-year-old retired optometrist, former Maine Amateur and three-time New England Senior champion, Polackwich traveled this summer to Poland — one of those countries barren of golf. His mission was twofold: visit family and talk about golf's possibilities in that country with Juliusz Sochan, deputy director of the Department of Interna-



Mark Leslie,
managing editor

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Letters

POROUS CERAMIC FOLLOW-UP

To the editor:

I certainly enjoyed reading the articles about porous ceramics in the September issue. It is most gratifying to know that the industry is beginning to take notice of what I perceive to be an extremely important advance in soils management and root-zone engineering. I would like to offer some clarification in a few areas that were addressed in the article, if I may.

I think it is important to state that porous ceramics and organics are not necessarily in competition with each other. They may, in fact, be complementary in many instances. In some sands, porous ceramics may be all that is required. In others, it is desirable to include both types of materials in order to achieve the most ideal balances. The goal is to create a root-zone mix that has excellent water-holding characteristics while maintaining very high percolation rates and to use whatever materials it takes to accomplish those objectives. Porous ceramics offer the advantage of being permanent, while organics change due to biodegradation.

Another comment centered around the differences between "calcite and clay" vs. diatomaceous earth products. The

proper term is calcined clay; also calcined diatomaceous earth. The calcining process is the firing process, which renders the materials physically and chemically stable. By definition, calcining is heating a material up to, but just short of, the melting point. The amount of time and the exact temperatures are extremely important to properly calcine a material. Profile is double-calcined, while Isolite and Axis are calcined once. Also, because of the difference in base materials, Profile will increase CEC, while the diatomaceous products will not. Soil pH is also affected differently, due to pH differentials between the base materials.

Lastly, I would like to comment on Ed Seay's statement regarding the elimination of rock and tile. This is certainly a possibility with the increased flexibility that porous ceramics provide, but it would not apply in all cases. Existing soil types and climatic conditions must be factored in before making this type of decision.

We should remember, however, that some of the most outstanding greens in this country have no sub-surface drainage. They exist on some of the fine old golf courses and were built long before the USGA concept was introduced. The Denver

Country Club, where I was once the superintendent, is a prime example.

It is my hope that the industry will not look at porous ceramics, per se, as simply a new product in the marketplace. The emerging technology surrounding these materials needs to be understood and intelligently applied in the golf and sport turf industries. The result will be better golf, safer fields and more environmentally sound turf.

Lou Haines, director
Technical Operations
Soils Management
Technologies

SCHOOL POLICY?

To the editor

Enclosed is a copy of a letter written by my 10-year-old nephew. He was involved in a class debate at school. This child was coached by his adult leaders to present this point of view.

Aside from the fact that this is a form of child exploitation, the promotion of this kind of mis- and disinformation creates a major public-relations problem for the golf course development industry. Children trust their leaders and tend to accept what they say at face value. How can the industry compete against that kind of power? What will the results be a few years down the

road when these children become adults who will decide the fate of proposed golf course developments?

This confirms my opinion that there are those in the environmental movement who will stop at nothing to impose their views on the rest of us. We in the golf course development industry cannot afford to be complacent in the face of this kind of activity. It is critical that steps be taken to combat this type of brainwashing and educate the general public to the truth about our industry.

Dan Nolan
Kajima Engineering and
Construction, Inc.
Golf Division

Patrick's Speech

Today's topic is the golf course. We would like to debate the golf course coming to the beautiful San Ynez Valley. This would be a problem because they will tear down the trees and wreck the environment. Animals homes will be destroyed, and many new drunk drivers will fill the streets. The air will be filled with pollution from the cars and new buildings that will be built. Because of the pollution people will get sick and possibly die, basically what we're trying to tell you is we want to keep this beautiful land from turning into LA. Thank you.

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Beaver Tail, RIP?

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of 70 years. One thing remains constant, however: Beaver Tail occupies a stunning piece of land, nestled as it is on a corner of Jamestown Island with Narragansett Bay and Rhode Island Sound lapping against it. The original 18-hole course was opened for private play in 1926 — very private play. In fact, Tillinghast designed Beaver Tail for one man, owner Audley Clarke, on whose estate it was built.

Shortly after he christened the course, however, Clarke started leasing it to various management companies, who could never make it profitable. At that time, Jamestown Island was accessible only by ferry, and the Depression era didn't help matters.

Nine holes were eventually sold for housing and, when Clarke died in the 1940s, the situation went from bad to worse, culminating in the complete abandonment of the course operation in 1947.

There it stood, dormant and overgrown, until the early 1970s when a distant relative of Clarke's, Robert Munro Clarke, became intrigued by this course in hibernation. Clarke the younger is not a golfer and owns only 18 acres of the former course. Yet he decided the nine remaining holes could be restored to profitably serve the Newport summer crowd.

Then he discovered it was a Tillinghast original and lightbulbs went off in his head.

Steve Smyers was retained to design a new nine to accompany the Tillinghast nine, while Clarke set about securing enough land. He couldn't do it. As it turned out, neither could Abrams and Senior Tour Development.

Phillips comment

Continued from page 12

tion tourney reaches the man on the street, while the firm's backing of the GCSAA's Environmental Steward Award is designed to create positive vibes in the turf market. There is new leadership here, as well. Senior Vice President Michael Kely has succeeded Dick Stahl as head of the Professional Business Group.

• Then there's the new kid on the block: **United Horticultural Supply (UHS)**. This Aurora, Ore.-based firm has been around for a long time, but it has thrust itself into the fertilizer fray with its new temperature-sensitive, controlled-release product, ESN. "It's been going real well," reports Fertilizer Product Manager John Walther, "but we feel we still have a long way to go. Even the researchers need to better understand these technologies."

These aren't the only firms fighting for a piece of the fertilizer pie (a less-than-appetizing but apt metaphor for the growing importance fertilizer has in this, the heyday of IPM). There's **Lebanon Chemical Corp.**, which has taken the same route as Scott, supplementing its strong product line with sponsorship of the GCSAA's Environmental General Session. **Milorganite** has gone to new packaging, expanding its market outside the Midwest, where the Milwaukee-based firm has been extremely successful. **Vicksburg Chemical Corp.**, along with its sister company, Haifa Corp., are now the largest producers of potassium nitrate in the world, providing significant backing to its coated KNO₃ product, Multicote. When you add the strong and growing regional presences of **The Andersons** and **Terra Products**, it's hard to imagine anyone can earn the market share they seek.

Consolidation, anyone?

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