Mass. firm tests market for biodegradeable tees

By J. BARRY MOTHES

DALTON, Mass. — A small western Massachusetts environmental business thinks it has the answer to tee areas littered with broken tees that take months, if not seasons, to decompose.

The Terra Form company makes biodegradable "TerraTees" from corn starch and other biodegradable materials. TerraTees absorb moisture more quickly than wood and become inviting to microorganisms. They decompose in about six weeks. Wooden tees take a full season, if not longer.

TerraTees are currently sold in selected environmental stores, some golf specialty shops like Pro Golf Discount and Nevada Bob's, and K Mart and Wal-Mart. The company also does a fairly brisk business in the custom advertising specialty market. A box of 15 tees recently sold for $1.99 at an environmental specialty store in Maine.

Gary Larravee, the co-owner of Terra Form, said the idea for TerraTees was born three years ago during a meeting with Warner Lambert Co., the company which made Listerine, Trident gum and other pharmaceuticals. Warner Lambert had a material that was in need of an application. The company had tried to make golf tees from the material on its own with mixed results. Larravee told Warner Lambert he cold do it, and from there launched the product.

As well as having a quicker decomposition rate than wooden tees, TerraTees are quickly and easily sliced by certain types of golf course maintenance equipment, like mowing reels, that can be nicked or affected by wooden tees. Larravee said he has heard mixed reports about the strength of TerraTees compared to wooden tees. He said some people have told him they break the tee every time they tee off, while others claim to get two or three hits off them.

TerraTees are not the first biodegradable golf tee ever produced. Larravee said a 14-year-old boy in Golden, Colo., made a biodegradable golf tee from peat moss, recycled paper and other products for a science project and won a national science fair with the idea. The boy's father opened a business around the product but it didn't pan out.

"Right now we are the only ones in the U.S. doing it," said Larravee. "The market hasn't expanded because of the cost of the tee. We can't compete with a wooden tee."

TerraTees are slightly more expensive than wooden tees, something that Larravee sees as a real obstacle to truly cracking the serious golf market.

TerraTees cost between 3 and 5 cents each while wooden tees cost one cent. Larravee hopes to be able to change that in the near future if the cost of materials goes down.

"We're trying hard to get into the resorts and [golf] clubs," Larravee said. "That's where the big market is."

Milorganite deal backs turf research

MILWAUKEE, Wis. — Turf managers can help support turfgrass research when they buy Milorganite fertilizer this fall, according to Alan Nees, Milorganite's director of marketing. For each ton of 50-pound bags or new 1,000-pound mini-bulk bags purchased and delivered between now and Nov. 30, Milorganite will donate $10 to the superintendent's turfgrass research organization of choice.

"We've been long-time supporters of turfgrass research at the national level through our involvement with the O.J. Noer Turfgrass Research Foundation," Nees explained. "We're excited about this program because it enables Milorganite customers to support turfgrass research at the local level as well."

Call Milorganite at 1-800-287-9645 or your Milorganite distributor for details.

RANSOMES EARNS PATENT FOR LEAK DETECTION SYSTEM

LINCOLN, Neb. — Ransomes America Corp. has been awarded a patent by the U.S. Patent Office for its hydraulic oil leak detection system. Early detection of hydraulic oil leaks helps prevent turf damage. Adaptable to either the Ransomes Greensplex 160 greens mower or the Ransomes 250 fairway mower, the Ransomes Turf Protection System features a float sensor, temperature gauge and microcomputer which work in concert to monitor hydraulic oil levels and temperature variances.