

Kubota takes action against knock-offs

TORRENCE, Calif. — Kubota Corp. and two of its U.S. affiliates, Kubota Tractor Corp. and Kubota Manufacturing of America Corp., have filed an action with the International Trade Commission in Washington, D.C. to stop the importation, distribution and sale in the United States of "gray market" Kubota tractors designed for sale in the Japanese market.

These "gray market" tractors are materially different in several respects, including safety features, from comparable

Kubota tractors designed for sale in the United States. The importation, distribution and sale of the "gray market" Kubota tractors have caused and are likely to cause confusion in the marketplace, according to Richard Briggs, legal counsel for Kubota Tractor Corp. The ITC is expected to initiate its investigation of this matter early this month. The ITC action is expected to take about one year to conclude.

For further information, contact Briggs at 310-370-3370.

An ear to the floor...

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100. Competition breeds this type of one-upsmanship, but it also breeds studied innovation; and no segment of the golf industry has benefited more from a spirited technological free-for-all than irrigation. Case in point: While celebrating the 20th anniversary of its computerized Maxi system this year, Rain Bird trotted out its Maxi for Windows Stratus, the company's second generation of Windows-based software designed for superintendents with little or no computer experience. Toro countered with TouchNet, an irrigation control system operated via fingers on a computer screen, as opposed to key strokes. Obviously, this innovation is also aimed at the technologically challenged superintendent.

In November, on the heels of Pursell Industries' alliance with J.R. Simplot and Vigoro Corp.'s recommitment to golf, I opined on the increasingly crowded, competitive fertilizer industry. This dog-eat-dog situation was highlighted in Orlando, where all players fought for the attention of superintendents while trotting out the market's new product-line must: slow-release technology. Vigoro jumped into the game with V-Cote, which joins The Scotts Company's Poly-S, Pursell's Polyon, and ESN from United Horticultural Supply. However, the prime-time players — which also include Milorganite, Lebanon Seaboard, Vicksburg Chemical and The Andersons — would be well advised to peer over their collective shoulder at Terra, golf's sleeping giant. Once an ag-only firm with \$3 billion in sales, Terra has set its considerable sights on golf by aggressively gobbling up distributorships in the Midwest and Southeast. While most of Terra's 400-plus distributors are primarily agricultural, the firm plans to convert them all into golf/ag dual outlets. Further, by its own admission, Terra products target the public-access market, i.e. the mid- to smaller-budget courses that now comprise two-thirds of the nation's golf course stock. Terra has developed a fairly complete line of chemical and, yes, fertilizer products, making the Sioux City, Iowa-based firm one to watch... One



last fertilizer note: Scotts now lists its common stock on the New York Stock Exchange under the symbol SMG, chosen to represent the Scotts/Miracle-Gro merger. According to President and CEO Theodore Host, this is another step in Scotts continued growth. Since the company went public in January 1992, sales have gone from \$413.6 million to \$732.8 million in fiscal '95.

After 20 years with Tee-2-Green/Turf Seed, Dr. Bill Meyer is leaving the Hubbard, Ore.-based firm to head up the prestigious Turfgrass Breeding Program at Rutgers University. Turf Seed honcho Bill Rose expressed remorse at losing such a respected name in the seed business, but it appears Meyer has left the company with a stable of promising new bentgrasses, now being tested at sites all across the country. Testing in Oregon has been washed out, literally, by the well publicized flooding. Will this affect pricing come fall? "We don't see any problems," explained Mike Robinson of Seed Research. "The problem is mostly along the riverbanks, and we don't grow a lot of seed there." Robinson did say there will be a shortage of ryegrass seed this year, meaning higher prices. Excessive demand, reduced acreage and chemical damage could reduce the total yields as much as 20 percent, he said. "Also," Robinson added, "because it was so wet, we had a serious slug outbreak in the younger fields." Field burning used to take care of the slugs, but that practice has been banned. The only remaining control is slug bait pellets, which were largely washed away by heavy rains, Robinson said. Then there's the wheat issue: "Wheat prices are high, and wheat can be grown on ryegrass fields," he explained. "If it's \$5 per bushel, the growers might plant wheat instead. With wheat, costs are lower, you don't have to spot spray and you can sell it on the futures market."

It appears the Golf Car Manufacturers Association, a trade group representing the interests of industry buggy-makers, has fallen into a state of inaction as Club Car has stopped reporting its quarterly sales numbers. In terms of the industry's major players, that leaves only Yamaha and E-Z-GO to compare figures. "And there isn't much point in that," said one industry source. Liability and emission issues will more than likely bind the three major manufacturers together in some form, but the association has lost a major *raison d'etre*.

Rohm & Haas, makers of Dimension pre-emergent herbicide, have taken a gamble by cutting recommended application rates when the product is applied to fertilizer. If the weather is good this year, they'll likely come out smelling like a rose as performance will probably not dip commensurate with the application rate. This will also place pressure on competitors to follow suit by similarly cutting application rates, and profits. However, if the weather is bad — producing conditions more favorable to disease — the lower rate could backfire on Rohm & Haas. Key to applying pre-emergent herbicide to fertilizer is pellet size: The smaller the pellet, the more evenly the chemical is spread. With a lower application rate, it's even more vital that superintendents seek out the smaller pellet.

Stay tuned.

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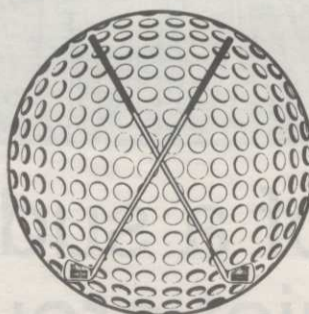
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