

GOLF COURSE NEWS

THE BUSINESS NEWSPAPER FOR THE GOLF COURSE INDUSTRY

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2002 NEWSMAKERS

First Nat'l sees rise in volume

By DEREK RICE

MARTINSVILLE, N.J. — Despite an economic downturn in 2002, First National of America Inc. has not seen a decrease in the number of golf course loans it has made, according to Jerry Sager, First National's president.



"Either we're dull and boring or incredibly wrong. We do about the same lending volume each year," he said. "We did a little more volume, surprisingly enough, this past year than the year before, and I know everybody else wasn't doing stuff."

Sager attributes this increased volume to First National's commitment to look at loans for projects on Native American land (GCN, April 2002), as well as the company's track record as a national lender for golf projects.

"We opened up a new lending market because we're doing Native American stuff now, which we did not do before. So that's

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2002 NEWSMAKERS

Drought concerns linger into winter



State water restrictions forbid the irrigation of roughs this summer at Dauphin Highlands Golf Course in Oberlin, Pa.

By ANDREW OVERBECK

WESTFIELD, N.J. — Moderate to extreme drought conditions gripped 45 percent of the country this summer, leading to widespread water restrictions and maintenance headaches for superintendents. While some areas have gotten relief from fall rains, water use is still being regulated in other parts of the country and concerns over long-term water shortages are looming large.

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, 29 states had significantly be-

low average precipitation and this year. This past June through August was the warmest since the 1930s.

"This was the hardest year I have ever had to maintain turf," said Chris Carson, superintendent at Echo Lake Country Club in Westfield, N.J.

Superintendent Bill Wall at Dauphin Highlands Golf Course in Oberlin, Pa., agreed. "The last two years have been the most difficult years I have had, and I have been in central Pennsylvania since 1975," he said.

Parts of Pennsylvania and all of

New Jersey were placed under water restrictions early this spring after an unusually dry winter.

"In March we had our water cut back to 50 percent of the

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2002 NEWSMAKERS

NGP buyout nearly done

By DEREK RICE

SANTA MONICA, Calif. — When National Golf Properties (NGP) announced in February that it would merge with its sister company and largest tenant American Golf Corp. (AGC), the immediate reaction was not positive. Many industry insiders claimed the deal was merely an attempt to bail out NGP's major shareholders and thought either bankruptcy or breaking up the company would be more appropriate.

After several months of negotiations and rumor-fueled speculation, NGP found a buyer in a group led by Goldman Sachs and Starwood Capital (GCN,

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Bayer to sell fipronil product line to BASF

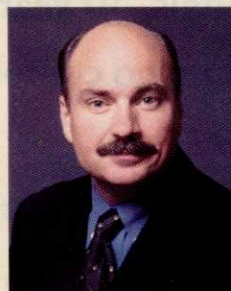
By ANDREW OVERBECK

MONTVALE, N.J. — BASF agreed Oct. 28 to buy certain assets including fipronil insecticides and several fungicides from Bayer AG, clearing the way for full regulatory approval of Bayer's acquisition of Aventis CropScience and the creation of Bayer Environmental Sciences. Officials from both companies would not discuss the specifics of the pending transaction.

The U.S. Federal Trade Commission granted approval to Bayer's acquisition of Aventis CropScience in June, but required the divesti-

ture of acetamiprid and fipronil to be completed by December (GCN, July 2002). The deal, worth a reported \$1.16 billion, would beat that deadline and includes buy-back license agreements that would allow Bayer ES to market certain products and retain trademarks. The FTC and the European Commission must still approve the transaction.

Dan Carrothers, head of the



Dan Carrothers

U.S. green industry business for Bayer ES, anticipates the deal to be completed by early December.

"Until that time, we are still operating under the FTC guidelines of 'hold separate,'" said Carrothers. "We

cannot fully integrate the sales force until the divestment has occurred."

While acetamiprid is being

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Turf-Seed continues research on male sterile and naturally Roundup tolerant turfgrass

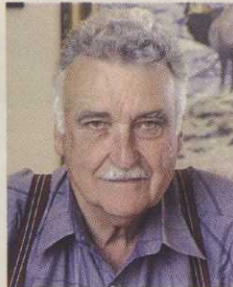
By ANDREW OVERBECK

HUBBARD, Ore. — The development of Roundup Ready creeping bentgrass by Scotts and Monsanto has been a contentious issue, as detractors here in the Willamette Valley contend the transgenic turf will ruin the country's primary bentgrass production region.

Bill Rose, president of Turf-Seed, has been the most vocal, predicting earlier this year that the Oregon Department of Agriculture's (ODA) approval for open pollination of Roundup Ready bentgrass in an 11,000-acre control area in Jefferson County would be a "disaster" (GCN, Sept. 2002).

"As a result of this control area, I expect to see genetically-altered turfgrass banned in the United States," he said. "My goal is to try not to get it banned."

Rose is concerned that production fields in the Willamette Valley could be contaminated, jeopardizing exports to Japan and Europe, which have strict regulations on genetically modified organisms.



Bill Rose

There is also resistance from groups in the United States like the International Center for Technology Assessment, which is pressing the United States Department of Agriculture's Animal Plant and Health Inspection Service (APHIS) to deny Scotts' and Monsanto's petition for approval of Roundup Ready creeping bentgrass. In a petition filed in August, the group called Roundup Ready creeping bentgrass a "superweed" and

said the transgenic turfgrass has the potential to cause ecological and economic disruption because it could contaminate other stands of turf. The organization is also petitioning the USDA to list Roundup Ready creeping bentgrass as a noxious weed.

Rose, however, is trying to avoid the above scenarios by developing Roundup Ready creeping bentgrass that is male sterile, reducing the chances of any cross-contamination. In October, researchers said that they had a male sterile bentgrass plant.

"We found a number of plants that are

transgenic that are proven to be male sterile," said Rose. "The results in October look very good, but we will wait until January or February for another generation to confirm it."

After confirmation, Rose said, the next step will be to conduct field-testing and that will require getting a permit from the ODA.

Rose's company Pure Seed Testing is also working on getting a turf label for its naturally Roundup tolerant Aurora Gold hard fescue and Pure Gold and Tomahawk RT tall fescues that are already on the market.

According to Pure Seed president Crystal Rose-Fricker, the company is waiting for an approval from Monsanto so it can release recommended safe Roundup rates that can be applied to the turf without harming it.

Rose-Fricker said work is also progressing on naturally Roundup tolerant creeping fescue, chewings fescue, slender creeping fescue, perennial ryegrass, Kentucky bluegrass, and bentgrass.

Scotts, Monsanto preparing to resubmit Roundup Ready bentgrass petition

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process hit a snag in September when APHIS issued a "letter of deficiency." The request for more information prompted Scotts and Monsanto to withdraw their petition for approval Oct. 3.

According to officials from both Scotts and APHIS, the withdrawal is an expected part of the approval process. Neither side, however, could specify exactly why the petition was withdrawn.

"We anticipated that they [APHIS] would request more information and additional data," said Scotts spokesman John Bosser. "They have asked for more data for a couple of the trials and tests concerning the biology of the plant. So we have withdrawn the petition and we will resubmit with additional data early next year. It is just a formality and we are still looking at an introduction in 2004 or 2005."

Bosser said since 1998 close to 40 percent of the petitions to APHIS have been withdrawn in order to submit additional data and then resubmitted. In fact, Monsanto's original petition for Roundup Ready corn was withdrawn in October 1997 before finally being resubmitted and approved in September 2000.

COLLECTING GOLF COURSE DATA

While Scotts and Monsanto work on

gaining additional data for APHIS, Wayne Horman, director of seed sales and marketing for Scotts, is overseeing testing at individual golf courses across the country. In addition to university testing, APHIS allowed 12 courses to begin on-site testing in 2001 and approved 18 more testing locations this fall.

"We added 11 more courses this fall and we will add seven or eight more next spring in areas where it was too late to seed because of cold weather," said Horman. "Courses are placing the turf in their nurseries so they can compare it to varieties that they are using today. The data we have gotten so far is favorable."

"The courses that started testing last year are monitoring the grandparents of the variety that will eventually come to market," he added. "The new courses are testing turf that is more like the variety that will come to market."

In addition to on-site testing work, Horman is also conducting education sessions with superintendents.

"The educational phase is moving forward and we have done sessions explaining the technology and what it can do," said Horman. "There is interest from superintendents, some have already asked me when they can buy it. But we can't sell or market it until APHIS approves it." ■

Ross reviews new products of the year

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walk spreaders. One has to wonder what took so long for us to have these.

When it comes to iron, the debut of the Toro 4500-D/4700-D was probably the most talked-about new mowing unit. By learning from the faults of previous large out-front turf rotaries and increasing engine horsepower, this unit has performed very well for many courses.

Another mower which drew high interest this season was the Jacobsen LF 1880 fairway unit. Although not available for the better part of the season, demo units were out in force, and the feedback among superintendents was generally positive. The concept of this fairway mower falls between the triplex and fiveplex. It was being marketed toward high-end facilities with close-cut fairways. It has 18-inch cutting units that are very similar to a greensmower, and follows turf contours very well. We will have to wait until next year to see whether this machine will make a true splash in the fairway marketplace.

Although not new, two pieces of equipment still seem to be the talk of the industry.

The Toro Flex 21 may still be the hottest mowing unit on the market. In its second full season, this mower started to dominate the walking greensmower market. One major reason for this (besides the concept of the machine) was the lack of

mechanical problems since its debut. This season, Toro also offered attachments for the unit, from brushes to groomers. These additions now offer even greater benefits for this mower.

The second unit that seemed to be on



The Toro 4500-D out-front rotary mower tackles the rough.

the tip of everyone's tongue, especially those with newer bentgrasses, was the Graden Dethatcher.

As superintendents increasingly scrutinize their thatch management plans, this unit seems to fit into that plan. It offers the use of one-, two- and three-mm blades and adjustable depth of up to one-and-a-half inches, all depending upon the level of aggressiveness desired on green surfaces. Some courses even combined the Graden with the aerification operation to achieve very high thatch percentage removal. ■

Bayer divests fipronil

Continued from page 1

developed for the greenhouse industry, the fipronil divestiture will directly impact the golf market. Current fipronil products include Chipco Choice, Top Choice and Fire Star.

"We have the right to negotiate licensing back the products, but there is no guarantee," Carrothers said. "But the opportunity for a co-exclusive is part of the negotiations."

If licensing back the products doesn't pan out, Carrothers said Bayer ES would still have a very strong product line.

"It is not critical to our business model," he said. "Our portfolio is still extremely strong. We have products like 26GT, Merit, Compass and Bayleton that will make a huge impact in the golf market."

Bayer ES also has three insecticides, two

herbicides and four fungicides in development right now.

Three of the new products are currently in the registration process with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Those being reviewed include: Triton, a broad-spectrum fungicide; Lynx, a sterile inhibitor fungicide; and Revolver, a post-emergent herbicide that removes cool-season turf from warm-season turf.

"When we look at our project review, we look at what diseases and pests are controlled and what the unique selling proposition is," said Carrothers. "Then we look at whether the active ingredient is compatible from an EPA perspective. All of this is being looked at to make sure we come out with new technology that our customers want and need. We need to bring new solutions to superintendents to help them more effectively manage their courses." ■