

BY MARISA PALMIERI

Environmental considerations

A public course on Long Island uses organic fertilizers where it can

As golf course superintendent at Bergen Point Golf Course, Deron Snyder cites a number of reasons he's exploring organic fertilizers. Restrictions, environmental considerations and cost influence his decision to incorporate organics into his nutrient program.

Bergen Point, a links-style layout on Long Island that generated 45,000 rounds last year, features ryegrass tees and fairways and 60/40 Poa/bengrass greens. Snyder manages the course with a \$400,000 budget.

MOVING TOWARD MANDATES?

The environmental oversight of Suffolk County, which owns the 18-hole public facility in West Babylon, N.Y., is the No. 1 reason Snyder's using organic fertilizers.

"I've incorporated more organics into my program because of where I'm located," says Snyder, who became acclimated with organic fertilizer before joining Bergen Point a year ago when he was an assistant superintendent at Middle Bay Country Club in Oceanside, N.Y. "They're definitely pushing alternatives to pesticides and synthetics. We're right on the bay, so I'm very conscious. I don't spray or fertilize my roughs. I just fertilize the greens, fairways and tees."

The county already limits the time of year municipal properties can be fertilized (April 1 through November 1). It doesn't mandate the

use of organic fertilizers yet, but considering the county restricts what pesticides Snyder can use, he believes more fertilizer regulation is possible. So, he's incorporating organic products to stay ahead of the curve.

"I wouldn't doubt it if there were more restrictions countywide or statewide," Snyder says. "It's definitely a concern, especially on Long Island. That's why I'm trying to go more organic."

Though some facilities are touting the use of organic materials as "going green" initiatives,

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ONLINE EXTRA

Evaluating the need to feed: Read about how superintendent Joe Lucas takes a lean, mostly organic approach to fertilizing the golf course at Saratoga National Golf Club in Saratoga Springs, N.Y.



Duke poses on a green at Bergen Point Golf Course, where superintendent Deron Snyder spends about a quarter of his \$20,000 fertilizer budget on organic products.

DERON SNYDER

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Snyder says marketing isn't motivating his approach.

"To be honest with you, I'm not sure the golfers know," he says. "I don't promote it. It's more to benefit the course and environment.

In addition to pressure from the county and an internal desire to move toward organic products, Snyder also uses organic fertilizer because he likes the way it works.

A significant benefit of organic fertilizer is it adds to the amount of organic matter in the soil, and increased organic matter helps soil retain nutrients, Snyder says.

THE PROGRAM

Of Snyder's \$20,000 fertilizer budget, about a quarter is spent on organics.

For Snyder's greens program, the first fertilizer application is a water-soluble synthetic fertilizer, which gets nutrients into the turf quickly, he says.

Snyder waits until right before the summer when the temperature increases and there's microbial activity in the soil to make an organic fertilizer application. At that time, he uses the Sustane 10-2-10 product.

About 12 weeks later, Snyder spoon feeds the greens with Growth Products' Essential Plus and Companion soil amendment.

Snyder's fall applications include 1) a synthetic fertilizer with a high phosphorous rate when he seeds, and 2) a final application of an 8-2-4 organic fertilizer.

On fairways and tees, Snyder uses synthetics, mainly because of cost, at a rate of 3 pounds per 1,000 square feet for the year.

"I'd like to look into going organic on the fairways, but synthetics last a bit longer – between 12 and 16 weeks," he says.

RIGHT THING TO DO

Aside from preparing for potential restrictions,

Snyder believes scrutinizing all inputs is the right thing to do for the environment.

"I wish I could be more like the Vineyard," Snyder says of the Edgartown, Mass., golf club that's known for its efforts in developing an organic maintenance program.

At the GCSAA Conference and Golf Industry Show in February, Snyder attended a half-day seminar called "Organic Approach to Golf Course Management" led by the Vineyard's superintendent Jeffrey Carlson, CGCS, and Frank Rossi, Ph.D., associate professor of turfgrass science at Cornell University.

Snyder learned he could do more to move to an organic approach, but he can't match the Vineyard's efforts without a big budget increase.

"They definitely have more money there," he says. "I only spend about \$60,000 on pesticides and fertilizer a year, so it's tight, but if I can use organics, I will." **GCI**