[EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK]

Keeping green green

Rain Bird's Intelligent Use of Water Summit shares smart-water practices that work, and encourages the golf industry to take a leadership position in innovative water management practices.

Brown doesn't have to be the new green if the industry better manages its available water resources and applies practices that more efficiently and effectively keeps turf green. That was the resounding message of Rain Bird's 2013 Intelligent Use of Water Summit, which took place last month at Michigan State University.

The conference on stewardship of water resources in the golf industry and featured a lineup of water experts and golf course superintendents who described the programs and efforts in practice to conserve and better utilize available water.

Keynote speaker and author of "The Big Thirst" Charles Fishman says there is no "global" water crisis. Rather, all water issues are local issues that need to be solved at the local level.

Fishman argues that, as a resource, water is too cheap, and with such a low price point it contributes to waste and inhibits the development of new ways to use and conserve it.

"Free is the wrong price for water. When a resource as important as water is free it's misused .... There is no incentive to use it correctly .... Water is so cheap it's starved of innovation .... We could solve all of our water problems by charging just a little bit more. No one is immune to water problems."

Many of the tools and technology needed to use water more efficiently already exist, Fishman says. Instead, they're just not being used.

"We have the tools we need (for smart water use)," he says. "What we need is the leadership (to use them)." He adds the golf industry can play that leadership role and serve as a benchmark for innovative, smart-water use in their respective communities. Examples are readily available among superintendents who have overcome water challenges. Fishman adds that smart water practices bring added benefits, as well.

"You save a little on water and then there's a cascade of savings that goes along with it," he says, adding smart-water practices also reduce energy and material costs. "You start saving on water and other good things happen."

Here are some other key points that came up during the various panel discussions.

U of Calif's Dr. Ali Harivandi: "Drought has become a part of our life ... because of that we have to look at other sources of water if you want to survive in (the turf) industry .... (Solutions are) expensive, but we can do it. Especially in areas where we don't have access to water .... We can all start praying for rain ... but we can also use the science and knowledge that is out there."

Desert Mountain Club's Shawn Emerson: "Brown is the new green? Where did they get that from? I'm about growing green grass. In saying that, I want to be more efficient and more educated (about water use) ... and we have the tools today to do this (grow green turf efficiently). You have to understand that you need to put all of the processes together ...." Emerson also added that, when it comes to irrigating efficiently and smart water use, knowing your numbers is job security. Superintendents need to take their technical skills and run with them, but they should never stop learning and improving.

Atlanta Athletic Club's Ken Mangum offers some great advice: "Your two eyes are the most important tools you have as a superintendent .... Be observant. See and notice things (on your course) before they become obvious to others."

Rutgers turfgrass researcher Stacy Bonos reports on ongoing research and developments to breed bentgrass and fescue that is both salt tolerant and drought resistant ... they have breeds that are solid (stay green) for each individual stress, the challenge is a single breed that remains green when exposed to both criteria.