

A call to action

A new initiative spearheaded by industry leaders offers hope for basic turfgrass research. BY KEVIN N. MORRIS

The annual value of the turfgrass industry in the United States is estimated to be between \$40 billion to \$60 billion. This figure includes the cost of establishing and maintaining turfgrass on golf courses, athletic fields, parks, home lawns, roadsides, sod farms and grounds of commercial buildings. Turfgrass covers an estimated 50 million acres in the United States, making turf the fourth largest U.S. crop. There are more than 31 million acres of irrigated turfgrass in the country, making turfgrass the largest irrigated U.S. crop.

U.S. research

Turfgrass research in the United States is almost exclusively conducted by state universities or private, for-profit companies. Private companies conduct research on fertilizers, new grass cultivars, pest control products, etc., for their own internal use. The information obtained from for-profit companies' research is proprietary and most often not released to the public. However, for-profit companies supply funding to university researchers to test products and help develop recommended rates and uses.

There are several nonprofit organizations such as the U.S. Golf Association, Golf Course Superintendents Association of America, National Turfgrass Evaluation Program and Turfgrass Producers International that also fund turfgrass research at state universities. The USGA has the largest research-funding program, averaging about \$1 million annually. NTEP, GCSAA, and TPI collectively fund about \$1 million in turfgrass research annually. There also are various state and local turfgrass organizations that provide funding to state university research programs. Private companies and not-for-profit organizations support an estimated \$10 million in turfgrass research annually.

Many states have at least one university with a turfgrass research program to serve the needs of the citizens and the turfgrass

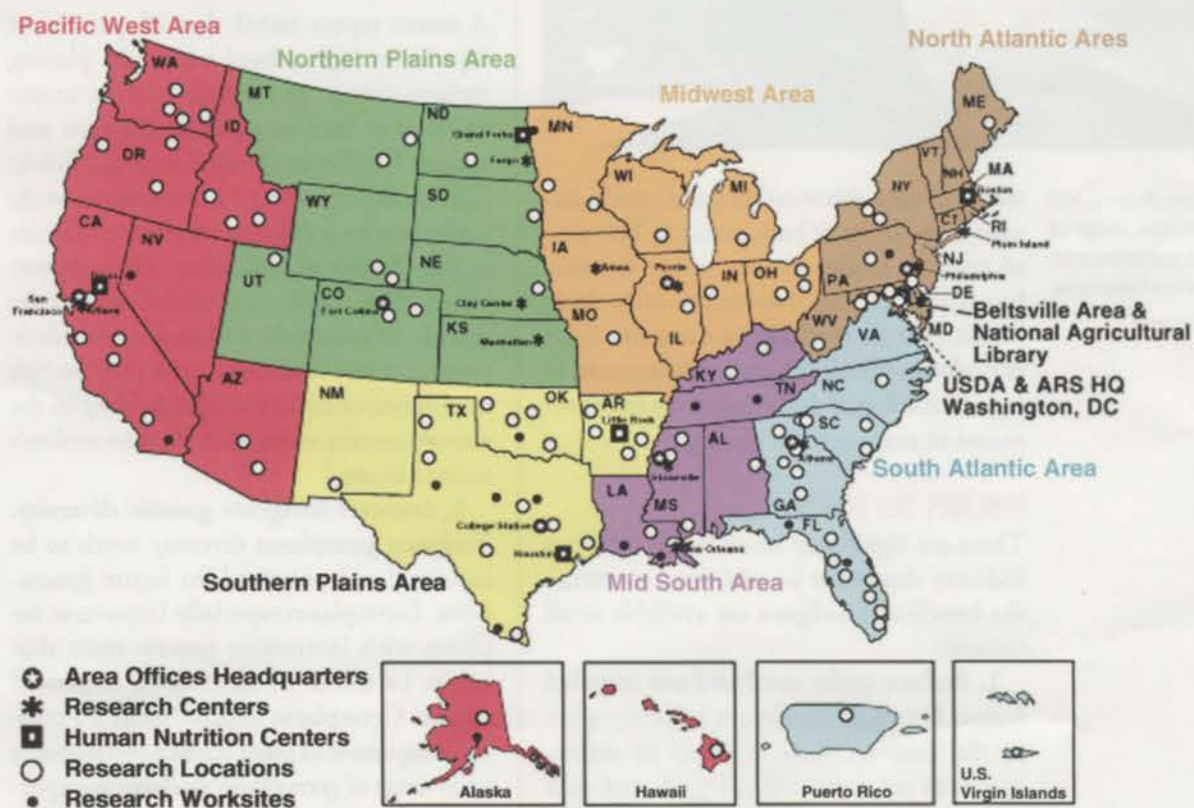
industry in that state. Funds for those research programs come from the aforementioned entities; state government funding; and through the federal government's Department of Agriculture, Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service. CSREES, which has an annual budget of \$1 billion, provides funding to state universities for agricultural research, education and extension related activities. These funds are directed to scientific disciplines and crops, including turfgrass; however, most of that funding is used for faculty salaries or extension activities. Little, if any, CSREES funding is directed to turfgrass research. Therefore, the activities of state university researchers are limited to what the states, private industry and organizations are willing to fund.

Applied research

Almost all turfgrass research dollars are provided by the turfgrass industry or industry associations to fund applied research rather than basic research. Applied research involves solving problems that are seen in the field by end-users such as golf course superintendents or agronomists. The shortcoming of applied research is its reliance on short-term problem solving.

Basic research tackles the tough problems. For example, basic research unlocked the secret that day length significantly affects plant growth and development. Basic research resulted in the development of hybrid seed corn, a huge advance in corn production. And more recently, the Human Genome project, a successful effort to identify the location of genes for disease

Photos and chart courtesy of the National Turfgrass Federation



The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agriculture Research Service has scientists at 100 locations in the United States. Many of those scientists are housed at or close to state land-grant universities.



ARS has more than 2,100 scientists nationwide, most of which conduct basic research on crops and animals.

susceptibility, abnormalities and critical human traits, is classic basic research. This type of research might not pay future rewards, but if it does, the rewards are often large breakthroughs resulting in quantum leaps of understanding problems, development of new technologies and important improvements in management strategies.

Issues to face

There are significant issues in the turfgrass industry that must be addressed to ensure the benefits of turfgrass are available to all citizens:

1. Reduce water used and use recycled water. Drought conditions in many areas of the country have resulted in watering bans on lawns, landscapes and golf courses, as well as restrictions on planting turfgrass by local jurisdictions. Because of incredible population growth in the drier, Western states, many areas have instituted lawn watering restrictions, including cities such as Las Vegas and Denver. Even the

wetter, Midwestern and Eastern states have enacted watering bans, or are considering doing so.

2. Reduce pesticide use and develop biological controls. Concerns about the impact of pesticides on human health have resulted in pesticide bans in some local communities. Toronto banned the use of pesticides on lawns, parks, golf courses and commercial properties. Additionally, more jurisdictions in Canada and the United States have enacted partial bans or are considering banning the use of pesticides on turf.

3. Reduce fertilizer use and protect surface water and groundwater. Nitrate and phosphorus pollution of waterways and groundwater supplies have prompted some states and jurisdictions to require reduced fertilization of turfgrass. Minnesota recently passed regulations restricting the use of phosphorus on turf because of the possibility of surface water and groundwater contamination. To improve and protect the quality of Chesapeake Bay water, the Maryland legislature passed nutrient management guidelines for turf. Other states are considering adopting similar proposals to regulate turfgrass fertilization.

4. Safety concerns on athletic fields and in parks. Overuse of athletic fields and budget cuts for maintenance have resulted in unsafe conditions on some fields. A recent report stated that 25 percent of injuries in high school soccer are playing surface-related. In some cases, these unsafe conditions lead to parental concern and action. The Parents United for D.C. Public Schools commissioned a law firm to study and report on public school athletic facilities in the District of Columbia. Their reports states: "D.C. public schools fail to meet the most basic standards of adequacy for athletic programs and facilities ... and run the risk of millions of dollars in legal liability in the almost certain event of a student-athlete's serious injury."

5. Increase turfgrass genetic diversity. Turfgrass germplasm diversity needs to be increased and preserved for future generations. Germplasm especially important are plants with interesting genetic traits that might be useful in developing improved grasses. Germplasm improvement is a critical component of plant science and having a wide range of germplasm available is important for breeding better grasses. Unlike most other crop species, little turfgrass germplasm is collected and placed into public germplasm banks. Having less germplasm in the public domain also increases the potential of a major disaster, such as a new disease or

insect wiping out turfgrass stands.

6. Better documentation of turfgrass's benefits. There's little understanding among the general public about the importance of turfgrass in protecting soil and water, heat reduction, dust control, etc., even though there is data to support these claims. One avenue to obtaining and releasing information about turf's benefits is through large, coordinated research programs.

Government help

The federal government, through the USDA, funds basic and applied research on many crops and for many agricultural industries. The USDA's Agricultural Research Service is the in-house research arm of the USDA and has a \$1 billion annual budget and 2,100 scientists at 100 locations. ARS has significant programs for corn, wheat, soybeans, fish farming, and floral and nursery crops. Could the same be done for the turf industry?

Turfgrass research initiative

The National Turfgrass Research Initiative is the blueprint for a coordinated national research program to be funded through USDA-ARS and conducted through a coalition including the USDA, the university research community and the turfgrass industry. NTRI discusses the industry and the crucial need for this research and identifies priority research goals and key programs.

Federal attention to the issues and research goals identified in NTRI is critical to the continued success of the turfgrass industry. A basic premise of NTRI is that federal research dollars should be directed toward programs that can't be funded adequately by states or industry, particularly for programs where the federal government can play a coordinating role not possible for any other entity. Certain research such as increasing the understanding of basic biological processes is too risky or long-term for private industry to fund. Other types of research, such as environmental research, are appropriate for government support because they clearly benefit society at large.

For NTRI to get off the ground, funding has to be appropriated by Congress. NTRI proposes \$450,000 be appropriated for each research scientist position within USDA-ARS – \$300,000 to hire a researcher and staff and purchase equipment at an ARS location, and \$150,000 for that researcher to conduct cooperative research with universities. If NTRI is fully funded (\$32.4 million),

(continued on page 57)

travels with  TERRY

Terry Buchen, CGCS, MG, is president of Golf Agronomy International. He's a 35-year member of the GCSAA and can be reached at terrybuchen@earthlink.net.

Globetrotting consulting agronomist Terry Buchen visits many golf courses annually with his digital camera in-hand. He will share helpful Ideas relating to maintenance equipment from the golf course superintendents he visits – as well as a few Ideas of his own – with timely photos and captions that explore the changing world of golf course management.

Catcher of the grass

Mower grass catchers left scattered around a turf-care center can be disorderly and cause a safety hazard for maintenance employees and guests. So Michael A. Mongiello, Jr., CGCS, director of agronomy at The Estancia Club in Scottsdale, Ariz., came up with an idea: building a simple but effective portable grass catcher rack for Toro's Greensmaster Flex 18 and 20 greens mower grass catchers. Brian A. Porcelli, operations manager at Estancia, designed and built the rack.

Forty-five feet of 0.75-inch-by-1.5-inch rectangular thin-wall tubing was used for the frame; six feet of 1-inch outside diameter, thin-wall tubing was used for the basket support brackets, which are 20 inches long; and 0.25-inch-by-3-inch-by-27.5-inch flat steel was used for the top support bracket. These parts were welded in place, primed and painted safety red. The 1-inch-outside-diameter-by-4-inch inserts are 12 inches apart – 16 are required.

It took about four hours to build the rack, which is 60 inches tall and can hold as many as eight grass catchers, and cost about \$200 in materials.



Hang it up

Shawn Geouge, golf course superintendent, at the Charleston (S.C.) Municipal Golf Course has a talented small equipment mechanic, John Axtell, who designed and built two variations of a string line trimmer rack.

The first rack (see top photo at left), which is commonly used in the industry, is mounted to stakeholders on the side of a Cushman Turf-Truckster's bed.

The second rack (see bottom photo at left) is mounted to a 2-inch-by-2-inch receiver hitch on an E-Z-GO Workhorse turf vehicle. Because the vehicle is leased, Geouge's staff didn't want to drill holes in the body. After the rack is mounted and secured with pins in the 2-inch receiver hitch, the front of the rack is bolted to the seat back rest for added stability. The 2-inch square tubing fits over the top of the tailgate through a notch. Two-inch-by-2-inch angle iron and 2-inch-by-2-inch square tubing steel is used to build the rack, which is bolted together.

The trimmer shaft mounted closest to the engine is secured with a quick disconnect pin purchased from Graingers for \$16 each. The rear portion of the shaft is held by gravity on a 2-inch-by-0.75-inch-thick piece of steel bent at a 90-degree angle. The rack was primed and painted glossy black.

The spool of trimmer string is hung on a round, 1-inch-by-9-inch piece of steel. Face shields can be mounted over the 90-degree-angle piece of steel that holds the lower part of the shaft in place.

The rack took about three hours to build and cost \$125 for materials. GCN



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- 1-Full Reconstruction
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- 7-No Renovations Planned

9. If Only a Partial Reconstruction is Planned, Please Indicate the Number of Holes _____

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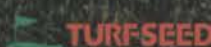
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this will allow ARS to hire 72 turfgrass researchers and allocate more than \$10 million annually to universities through cooperative research.

NTRI will be implemented by research teams that will frequently involve multiple research locations spread throughout several states to ensure the right mix of scientific skills is available for a systematic research strategy. The research dollars will be coordinated by and through the ARS budget. In turn, ARS will work with university and private industry researchers to establish research teams.

NTRI envisions that research should seek to adapt results from other agriculture or biological research areas, rather than starting anew for each project. In addition, all aspects of grassland agriculture will benefit from a coordinated, national effort to collect, evaluate and preserve grass germplasm.

NTRI consists of six broad research areas: water, germplasm, pests, environment, soil

and integrated turf management. Within each component are several research priorities. For instance, in the water component, there's a need to improve turfgrass water-use efficiency and irrigation efficiency and to investigate the use of recycled or saline irrigation water. The germplasm component focuses on collecting valuable germplasm, developing a better understanding of the genetic systems and genes in turfgrass species, and using this material and knowledge to develop and release improved germplasm leading to improved turfgrass cultivars.

Progress to date

Throughout the past five years, the National Turfgrass Federation had many meetings and contacts with many government officials. It has stressed the size and scope of the turfgrass industry, the important issues facing the industry and the need for federal research dollars to solve these problems.

The NTF convinced Congress to allocate funding for ARS to hire a research scientist in Maryland, conduct cooperative research

in Utah and hire a full-time research scientist in West Virginia. And in the ARS budget proposed by President Bush for fiscal year 2007, an additional \$1.88 million has been allocated for turfgrass research. If the additional funding is still in the final budget passed by Congress later this year, this will allow ARS to hire three to four researchers and develop cooperative projects with universities focusing on turfgrass water use issues. The NTF also is asking Congress to include funding for five additional research positions.

To learn more about NTRI, visit www.turfresearch.org or www.turfinitiative.org.

Contact your senators and representatives in Congress to let them know the importance of federal funding for turfgrass research by USDA-ARS. Ask them to support funding for the National Turfgrass Research Initiative. Ask your local and state turfgrass associations and supplier companies to make a contribution to the National Turfgrass Federation. The future of the turf industry is at stake. GCN



Agricultural engineer Kevin King examines discharge water from a turfgrass system in central Ohio as part of a research program designed to assess how land uses and management affect water quality.

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It's a family affair

Have you ever seen the movie, "Ferris Bueller's Day Off"? It's the goofy, sophomoric tale of a teen who skips school and goes on a series of adventures and misadventures with a couple of friends. Basically, it's a cinematic ode to playing hooky creatively.

Well, we have a "Ferris Bueller" tradition in my family. Once a year, if one of our boys has done something terrific, I call them in sick from school, and we do something fun for the day. It might be a trip to an amusement park or a day at the beach. The point is it's a total surprise and it's a day just for them.

My younger son – a fourth-grader – earned straight As this year, so it was definitely time for a Bueller day. But, instead of the usual kid stuff, I decided to combine it with "Take your child to work day." So, I woke him early, threw his sleepy, confused little butt into the car and headed down to The Memorial Tournament at Muirfield Village Golf Club in Dublin, Ohio, to attend a mid-week practice round.

It was a fabulous experience for three reasons. First and foremost, it was a special day with my boy. Secondly, it was a chance for him to learn more about golf and why daddy is madly in love with this insane game. Finally, in the back of my mind, it also was a way to pay tribute to the special role that family plays in our business.

The Memorial is, of course, hosted by Jack Nicklaus, a man who always made his family a big part of his golf persona. And the certified golf course superintendent at Muirfield is a young fellow named Paul B. Latshaw. Hmmm ... where have I heard that name before?

A game played by millions of people on trillions of blades of manicured grass has, most wonderfully, spawned gazillions of fabulous family trees. I seriously doubt scientists have identified a golf gene (or a turfhead chromosome), but it's pretty remarkable how much this business runs from father to son, brother to brother, grandparents to grandchildren, etc. Even uncles, aunts and cousins get in the act. The Latshaws, Paul A. and Paul B., are just one example. Here are a handful more from the business side of golf:

- Old Tom and Young Tom
- The innovative Valentines
- Shutterbugs Tom and John Mascaro
- Presidents Bob and Bruce Williams

- The thoughtful Cadenellis
- The amazing Alonzis
- The dynasty of Dye
- The fantastic Fazios
- Palmer, Dan and the huge Maples tree
- The giant Jemseks
- RTJ, Rees and Bob
- The empowered Powells
- The brilliant Baviers
- The Ohio Espositos

(Note: I know I'm leaving out a bunch of great folks, but I have to stop here. An e-mail request about this topic to about 30 friends throughout the country generated information about at least 80 more families who bleed green. Wow! That said, I'd love to hear your family story. Just e-mail me if you come from deep turf roots. We'd be thrilled to print your letters.)

Among superintendents in particular, the business is clearly a family affair. The question is: Why would so many choose to follow in their kin's footsteps when the trail is such a difficult one to walk?

As my son and I wandered around Nicklaus' and Latshaw's course and marveled at its beauty, I thought about this question and all the times I've talked with second-, third- or even fourth-generation superintendents about it. Here are a few of the answers I've received in the past:

1. You grow up with it, and the craziness just seems normal. No summer vacations. Dad leaving at 4 a.m., coming home at 3:30 p.m. and collapsing into a La-Z-Boy. Dinner-table talk about club politics. Calls in the middle of the night about that @#\$\$!! pump station. You've already lived it, so it's just logical you can handle it.

2. You fell in love with it during those occasional rides around the course in the passenger seat of dad's Cushman. The sights, smells and sounds of course maintenance stuck with you. The sense that "dad's in charge here" impressed you. You liked chasing the geese or playing in the mud holes the irrigation workers left behind. For whatever reasons, simply being exposed to the process got you hooked.

3. You got a summer job working for

your dad, your uncle, your brother (or some other miscellaneous relative) and just stayed. You looked up 10 years later and realized it was your career for life.

4. You hated the business and went to college to major in engineering or English or anything but turf ... but you weren't passionate about that other stuff. You changed majors along the way and, voila!

5. You tried another career and wandered back into the family business in your late 20s or 30s, realizing there was more to life than sitting behind a desk.

Those are all the standard answers, but the real insight came a few days later when I met a superintendent at a modestly budgeted muni in suburban Detroit. He's one of those overworked, understaffed guys who's way too busy trying to do seven different jobs or read GCN or any other turf magazine. He didn't know me from boo and wasn't sure what to make of some idiot purporting to be an industry journalist.

As we talked, I mentioned topics familiar to most frustrated superintendents:

long hours, low pay, lack of understanding from golfers, weather, stress and so on. After a few minutes, he looked at me – it was as if a light bulb turned on over his head – and said, "Oh,

you speak turf. Usually, it's only other superintendents or people in your family who understand. Most outsiders don't get it." Bingo.

This business is a family affair because, in most cases, only those who are that close to it can speak the native tongue. Maybe it's because of the Scottish roots of the game, but it feels like a clan: a family united by not only blood but a common purpose and shared history.

Golf brings people together in so many ways. On one day in May, it brought my son and me closer. In the case of family members who share the trials and joys of our profession, it's a special bond that lasts a lifetime. That's something to be appreciated, enjoyed and celebrated.

And, by the way, if you have kids and you're in the midst of the crazy season right now, I highly recommend a "Ferris Bueller" day with them. You won't regret it. GCN

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