

BY S.J. KOSTKA, J.L. CISAR, S. MITRA, D.M. PARK, C.J. RITSEMA, L.W. DEKKER AND M.A. FRANKLIN

Irrigation efficiency

Soil surfactants can save water and help maintain turfgrass quality

Golf courses are highly visible users of water, and the impact of their irrigation practices is scrutinized continually. Increasing regulatory mandates by government agencies and water utilities are driving the need for irrigation efficiency and conservation. Water might be conserved by maximizing input effectiveness (irrigation, precipitation) or minimizing output losses (transpiration, evaporation, runoff and leaching or drainage below the root zone).

Soil water repellency is a barrier that inhibits effective water management and conservation. Soil water repellency is a well-established phenomenon occurring worldwide in diverse soil types and with a range of crops and cropping systems (Wallis and Horne, 1992; Dekker et al., 2001). The phenomenon is attributed to the accumulation of hydrophobic organic compounds as coatings on soil particles and aggregates, as well as physiochemical changes that occur in

decomposing soil organic matter of plant or microbial origin (Miller and Williamson, 1977; Hallett, 2001).

Soil water repellency decreases infiltration of irrigation water and precipitation, causes nonuniform wetting of soil profiles, increases runoff and evaporation and increases leaching due to preferential flow (Dekker et al., 2001). This nonuniform wetting deprives the plant of a consistent supply of water and impacts turf health because of ineffective delivery and non-uniform distribution of soil-directed fungicides, insecticides and fertilizers.

Even small amounts of hydrophobic material can dramatically influence wetting in soils and the effectiveness of soil-directed products. When hydrophobic sand particles were mixed with hydrophilic sand in a model porous substrate system, as few as five to six hydrophobic particles per 100 (5 to 6 percent) induced resistance to

spontaneous wetting (Bauters et al., 1998). At 3 percent hydrophobic particles, the infiltration wetting pattern shifted from a wide horizontal wetting front to an unstable fingered pattern. Even at only 1 percent hydrophobic particles, flow behavior was modified negatively, yet the substrate was still considered wettable (Crist et al., 2004).

TOOLS FOR CONSERVING WATER

Soil surfactant use is well documented for the management of soil water repellency in thatch and soils, for control of localized dry spot on golf greens and for improved turf quality in highly managed turfgrass (Miller and Kostka, 1998; York and Baldwin, 1992; Cisar et al., 2000; Kostka, 2000; Karnok and Tucker, 2001). Recently, research and superintendent use have proven some soil surfactants can be used in best management practices to:



Soil water repellency is a barrier that inhibits effective water management and conservation. Photo: Rain Bird



UNTREATED

- Improve irrigation efficiency;
- Increase delivery and distribution of soil-directed fungicides, insecticides and fertilizers; and
- Conserve water.

Following is a review of recently published and unpublished research conducted about irrigated soils to illustrate the effects of surfactant treatments on soil wetting, runoff, turfgrass performance and water conservation strategies.

CALIFORNIA CASE STUDY

A two-year study was conducted at the Center for Turf Irrigation and Landscape Technology at the California State Polytechnic University in Pomona (Mitra et al., 2003). Twenty-four plots of bermudagrass (*Cynodon* spp. 'GN-1'), grow-

ing in a clay loam soil and maintained under fairway management conditions, were laid out in a replicated, split-plot design. Treatments included three different surfactants and an untreated control. The plots were irrigated at 100 percent of the reference cumulative monthly evapotranspiration demand in May, and were reduced to 70 percent ETo in June, followed by a further reduction to 30 percent ETo in July and finally, 10 percent ETo in August. Soil volumetric water content was monitored throughout the experiment using time domain reflectometry. The results were:

- All surfactants improved water retained in the root zone when compared to the control.
- There were notable differences observed between surfactant treatments.



TREATED

Even during periods of heat and water stress, surfactant-treated turf (shown here) provides soil root-zone moisture and better turf quality.

- ACA 1848 (APG-EO/PO block copolymer surfactant blend, currently commercialized as patented Dispatch) maintained adequate soil moisture between irrigation cycles.

- ACA 1848 performed better than other surfactants, and the effects were more pronounced under elevated moisture stress (30 percent and 10 percent of ETo). See chart on bottom of page 93.

FLORIDA CASE STUDY

A three-year study, 2002-04, was conducted on bermudagrass (*Cynodon dactylon* X *Cynodon transvaalensis* 'Tifdwarf') growing in a sand root zone at the University of Florida, (Fort Lauderdale Research and Education Center). One surfactant, ACA 1848, was tested and compared

RETURN ON SURFACTANT INVESTMENT

State	Yearly water consumption [millions of gallons]	Yearly water and energy costs	Yearly cost - surfactant	Net dollar savings
Rhode Island	20	\$20,000	\$3,000	\$1,000
Texas	110	\$120,000	\$6,000	\$18,000
California	115	\$125,000	\$7,500	\$17,500

Research

(treatment one)

- Nonirrigated surfactant treated plots (treatment three) had less localized dry spot than the irrigated plot (treatment one)

- Even with reduced water, the nonirrigated surfactant treated plot (treatment three) showed equal photosynthetic activity as treatment one and significantly better than treatment two.

OHIO CASE STUDY

Surfactant effects on water conservation and runoff were evaluated at The Ohio State University Turfgrass Research Center in Columbus on established bentgrass (*Agrostis stolonifera* L. 'L93'). Plots were established on a wettable, silt loam soil with a 4-percent slope. Controls received no surfactant treatment, while the remaining plots received weekly surfactant applications (ACA 1848). Soil water potential was monitored with in-ground sensors. Runoff was during periods when rainfall exceeded infiltration capacity of the soil. It was measured using tipping buckets installed at the lowest end of each plot (Sepulveda, 2004). The results were:

- During dry periods when supplemental irrigation was used, the surfactant treatment pro-

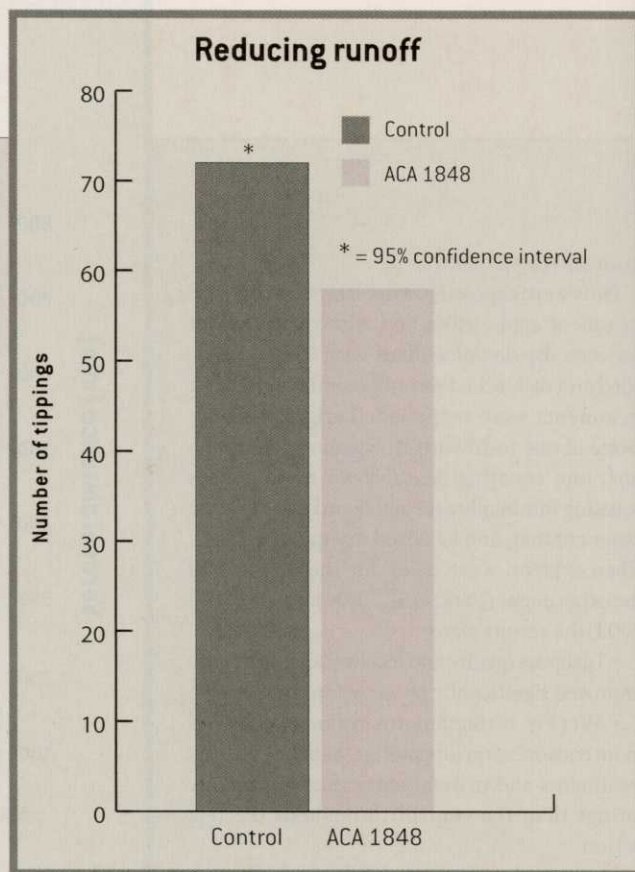
vided more available root-zone water than the control.

- During wet periods when inputs exceeded the infiltration capacity of the soil, runoff from surfactant treated plots was 20 percent less than from the control plots (P equals 0.05).

CONCLUSION

These results are based on multi-year evaluations in different soils supporting different turf types in dramatically different environments. They provide science-based evidence that surfactants can improve infiltration, increase soil root-zone moisture status and reduce runoff. These help superintendents improve irrigation efficiency and conserve water.

The key to water conservation is maximizing the amount of water entering the turfgrass root zone and maximizing its storage and availability



ACA 1848 significantly reduced runoff on the sloped area (chart above right). Less runoff means more of the water and pesticides percolated into the soil.

Soil surfactants can improve infiltration and increase soil root-zone moisture status. Photo: Toro



once in the root zone (Carrow et al., 2005).

Best management practices propose a diversity of options for conserving water including the potential for use of surfactants (Barton and Colmer, 2004; Carrow et al, 2005). Surfactant use as demonstrated in these studies provides a low-cost, high-return strategy to:

- Improve delivery of water to the root zone and reduce losses to runoff;
- Conserve water;

- Maintain golfer and management expectations for quality turfgrass; and

- Manage resources effectively – be those resources water or energy required for pumping, or fertilizer, fungicide and other products.

Future research is planned to:

- Further substantiate water conservation estimates;
- Establish effects on agrichemical runoff and leaching;

- Quantify improvements in irrigation efficiency and distribution uniformity; and

- Develop an understanding of surfactant use and its relation to soil nutrient availability, and the effect on fungicide and insecticide performance. **GCI**

Literature cited for this article can be found on our Web site, www.golfcourseindustry.com, posted with this article.



Research and superintendent use have proven some soil surfactants can be used to improve irrigation efficiency. Photo: Toro

IMPACT ON THE BUSINESS

Making financial sense of surfactants

Manufacturers say surfactants offer a low-cost, high-return benefit for golf courses. Research indicates a well-planned, well-executed surfactant program can reap considerable rewards, including improved delivery of water to the root zone, reduced run-off and better stress resistance. They can also help manage inputs including water, fertilizer and pest management products more effectively.

FINANCIAL RETURN

Surfactants can have an impact on overall water usage. Originally developed to hold water for better plant performance, golf course superintendents are using them now to stretch limited water resources.

With average water expenditures topping \$50,000 per course – and significantly higher in the Southwest and other year-round golf regions – a properly managed surfactant program can save thousands of dollars per year.

UP-FRONT INVESTMENT

Spot treatments can have an excellent agronomic impact, but the business impact is limited. However, by using surfactants as part of a fertigation or fairway application program, the return on investment can be extended substantially. Fertigation systems cost between a few hundred dollars to several thousand. But, for facilities that pay a considerable amount of money for

water, the use of surfactants through fertigation systems can more than pay for itself in the first year.

DROUGHT MANAGEMENT

Water restrictions have become a fact of life throughout the country. In some cases, the restrictions are short-term. In others, they are permanent. Surfactants and other water management tools are essentially “Hamburger Helper” for irrigation. A facility with a well-implemented water management program is likely to be green and healthy far longer than one that is not.

DOWNSIDES

The biggest downside to any water

management tool is misapplication. Some need to be watered in properly at the time of application, while others are good from the time they're put down. Use research from manufacturer's Web sites and other sources to ensure a product is being applied as effectively as possible.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Surfactants and wetting agents can be excellent tools for golf course superintendents, either in stand-alone situations or in combination with other products. Superintendents should consult their peers and check with researchers, USGA agronomists and other experts before embarking on a particular wetting agent program. **GCI**

the Wish list

check to see which pieces of
equipment you need to maintain
your course better

By Terry Buchen, CGCS, MG

The following golf course maintenance equipment list is comprised for an 18-hole golf course, practice putting green, chipping green, driving range and short-game practice area. It's an updated version of the list I prepared for the magazine back in the 1990s. This new-and-improved version reflects new types of maintenance equipment available. The list also is updated with equipment needed to provide upgraded agronomic and playing-condition standards today's golfers demand.

Obviously, this list is for a high-end facility and should be used as a guideline, adjusted accordingly, for private, semiprivate, public, municipal, resort, casino and military-type golf course maintenance operations. Adjustments depend on each venue's agronomic and playing-condition standards, goals and objectives, as well as available capital and maintenance operating budget funding.

✓ Greens (practice areas also)

- 10 walk-behind greensmowers with groomer attachments
- 8 maintenance carts with trailers
- 2 tow-type, spinner greens topdressing machines
- 2 topdressing drag brushes
- 1 300-gallon sprayer mounted on a maintenance vehicle with a walk-behind windfoil spray boom, hose reel and attachments (four-wheel drive where applicable)
- 4 rotary push-type fertilizer spreaders
- 2 drop-type stainless steel fertilizer spreaders
- 5 self-propelled, walk-behind blowers
- 2 tournament speed rollers with spiker/brush attachments with trailers
- 2 sets of light verticut reels for triplex greensmowers
- 2 walk-behind, deep verticut machines with topdresser attachments
- 1 set of spiker attachments for triplex greensmower
- 2 greens aerifiers
- 1 deep-tine greens aerifier
- 1 greens sweeper
- 2 water injection aerifiers with optional head
- 2 aerifier core harvesters
- 2 plug pushers
- 1 portable, subsurface greens drainage portable blower/pump

✓ Maintained roughs, short roughs and walk paths (practice areas also)

- 1 12-foot- and/or 16-foot-wide riding rotary mower (four-wheel drive where applicable)
- 2 72- to 88-inch-wide riding rotary mowers (four-wheel drive where applicable with leaf mulch kits where applicable)
- 2 reel- or rotary-type triplex mowers (all-wheel drive where applicable)
- 2 triplex reel-type mowers (all-wheel drive where applicable)
- 10 string-line trimmers
- 10 hovercraft-type rotary mowers
- 1 PTO tractor-mounted blower
- 2 turbine blowers with a trailer or maintenance cart mount
- 1 pull-type vacuum/sweeper
- 3 self-propelled, walk-behind blowers

✓ Fairways (practice areas also)

- 4 five-plex fairway mowers with one spare set of cutting units (four-wheel drive where applicable)
- 2 pull-type fairway topdressers with material handling systems
- 2 large fairway topdressing drag mats
- 2 triplex greens mowers with one spare set of cutting units (all-wheel drive where applicable)
- 1 large rotary PTO fertilizer spreader
- 1 rotary fertilizer spreader mounted on a maintenance vehicle
- 1 combined rototiller/seeder
- 2 300-gallon sprayers mounted on maintenance vehicles with windfoil spray booms, hose reels and attachments (four-wheel drive where applicable)
- 2 pull-type sweepers/vacuums
- 1 three-gang pull-type fairway/rough roller
- 2 fairway aerifiers
- 1 deep-tine fairway aerifier
- 1 shatter/pulverizer/slicer
- 2 plug pulverizers/sweepers
- 1 set of light verticut reels for five-plex fairway mowers
- 1 deep fairway verticut PTO unit
- 1 PTO verticut/seeder
- 1 grass clipping scattering/dispersal machine

✓ Tees, collars/approaches/collection fairways (practice areas also)

- 7 walk-behind 26-inch-wide tee/collar mowers
- 6 maintenance carts with trailers
- 3 triplex tee mowers with one spare set of cutting units (all-wheel drive where applicable)
- (Use fairway mower if practice tees are large enough)

✓ Clubhouse

- 2 walk-behind, self-propelled rotary mowers with grass catchers
- 2 riding trim mowers with sulkies
- 2 maintenance carts with trailers
- 2 sidewalk edgers
- 2 backpack blowers
- 2 backpack sprayers

Miscellaneous

- 3 utility tractors with turf tires (four-wheel drive where applicable)
- 1 skid-steer loader with fork lift, power auger and attachments
- 1 miniexcavator trackhoe with rubber tracks
- 1 300-gallon, self-contained hydromulcher
- 3 maintenance vehicles with hydraulic dump body (four-wheel drive where applicable)
- 1 one-ton dump truck (four-wheel drive with snow plow and salt spreader where applicable)
- 1 large dump trailer
- 1 three-quarter-ton pickup truck with power lift tail gate (four-wheel drive where applicable)
- 1 four-door SUV for the superintendent (four-wheel drive where applicable)
- 1 18-inch junior sod cutter
- 3 bunker/sidewalk powered reciprocator-type edgers
- 1 portable, 6,000-watt electric generator (with trailer where applicable)
- 1 portable, three-inch diameter trash pump with suction/discharge hoses and trailer
- 1 electric (48-volt) golf cart for the superintendent
- 1 equipment transport trailer licensed for highway use
- 2 riding bunker rakes with front sand blade and one landscape scraper box (all-wheel drive where applicable)
- 1 powered riding utility roller
- 1 three-point hitch tractor-mounted landscape scraper box with spring loaded teeth

- 1 three-point hitch tractor-mounted landscape rake
- 1 drag-type landscape harrow
- 1 row boat with oars and electric trolling motor
- 3 chain saws and climbing equipment
- 2 gasoline-engine-powered pole tree pruners
- 3 backpack sprayers
- 1 mechanic's all-terrain vehicle with generator, air compressor and tool box (four-wheel drive where applicable)
- 1 gasoline-powered firewood splitter (where applicable)
- 1 irrigation-system electric wire locator
- 1 irrigation-system electric wire fault finder
- 1 metal detector
- 1 irrigation-system PVC pipe specialty locator
- 1 sprinkler-head-leveler devise
- 1 portable GPS location devise
- 1 irrigation technician maintenance vehicle with generator, air compressor and tool box (four-wheel drive where applicable)
- 6 roller squeegees
- 1 500-gallon water wagon/tank trailer mounted.

Irrigation and drainage

- 1 loader/16-foot backhoe tractor with turf tires (four-wheel drive where applicable)
- 1 loader/six-foot backhoe compact tractor with turf tires (four-wheel drive where applicable)
- 1 four-wheel drive trencher or backfill blade with pipe or wire puller and attachments

Optional equipment and attachments

Optional equipment and attachments for the aforementioned should be acquired, as necessary and appropriately, from the original equipment manufacturers or aftermarket manufacturers. Examples include roll-over protection and other employee safety equipment and attachments, electrically and/or hybrid operated equipment, and mower front rollers. GCI

Terry Buchen, CGCS, MG, is president of Golf Agronomy International. He's a 38-year life member of the GCSAA and can be reached at terrybuchen@earthlink.net.

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- Bruce Williams, CGCS, Los Angeles Country Club
- Tommy Witt, CGCS, Northmoor Country Club, Highland Park, Ill.

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- 29-Other Golf Course
- 30-Golf Course Management Company
- 31-Golf Course Architect
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- 33-Golf Course Builder
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- A-Golf Course Superintendent
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- G-Builder/Developer
- H-Architect/Engineer
- I-Research Professional
- K-Assistant Superintendent
- L-Golf Course Management Company Executive
- Z-Others (please describe)

4. Number of Holes: (check one)

- A-9 Holes
- B-18 Holes
- C-27 Holes
- D-36 Holes
- E-Other

6. Total Annual Maintenance Budget: (check one)

- 1-Less than \$50,000
- 2-\$50,000-\$99,999
- 3-\$100,000-\$249,999
- 4-\$250,000-\$499,999
- 5-\$500,000-\$749,999
- 6-\$750,000-\$1,000,000
- 7-\$1,000,000+

7. Total Course Acreage _____

8. Course Renovation Plans for the Next 12 Months

- 1-Full Reconstruction
- 2-Partial Reconstruction
- 3-Greens
- 4-Tees
- 5-Fairways
- 6-Irrigation System
- 7-No Renovations Planned

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

10. What is the Name of the Architect Who Designed the Course? _____

11. What Year was the Course Built? _____

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- 1. Resort Chain
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- 4. None of the above

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