

GRAU'S ANSWERS TO TURF QUESTIONS

BY FRED B. GRAU



What's the Purpose of Turfgrass Conferences?

Time was when all turf conferences came during the few weeks between the New Year and the spring cleanup. Now, with conferences, schools, clinics, field days, demonstrations and just plain meetings, there is something going on somewhere all through the year. No longer is it possible for any one person to keep up with the scheduled events except by reading about them. With the foundations, associations and councils behind the conferences, there are more and diverse interests participating.

The question that comes to mind is, "Just what are we trying to accomplish?"

One phase of a conference that merits recognition is the social aspect. For many this is the annual chance to visit with friends and exchange ideas. Closely associated are the bull sessions where informal discussions of turf management extend far into the night at GCSA conventions. It is natural for salesmen to capitalize on the opportunity to see many customers in one place at one time. Objections arise only when the situation degenerates and thwarts chances for serious discussions.

The annual GCSA banquet fills a need as a vehicle for presentations, for recognitions, and for honoring distinguished guests. It has become a conference feature.

Rehash or Original?

Conference proceedings are published by some groups and not at all by others. One argument against publication is that a paper often is simply a rehash or previously-presented material, re-worked in

the style of the speaker. It can be said too, that much of the data in the form of progress is not ready to be published.

Much harm has been done by prematurely releasing incomplete information. Arguments for publication are: 1.) New information can be distributed to people not in attendance; 2.) "Rehashed" material often is given fresh and valuable information from the speaker's experience and observations; 3.) Progress reports on incomplete projects frequently give valuable hints on improved methods and inspire many spontaneous and independent studies on many levels at many locations.

The more advanced conferences have begun to develop a "Voice" which carries over to administrative officials. The "Voice" may be a committee or, in more advanced stages, a council. It is able to speak in terms of needs for research and for assistance through extension or through publications. Members of the "Voice" study aims and goals and prepare recommendations for administrative action.

Ideal Conference

A conference held at a research institution ideally is designed to present results of investigations that have been conducted over the past year, or since reports were given at the previous conference. Some of the papers are presented by visiting professors from other institutions where work has been conducted that supplements that being done "at home". Quite often a feature is a presentation by one or more supts. who have accomplished extra results which have value for others.

Running all through the conference is a constant questing by supts. for a "formula", a recommendation for what to do precisely in given situations, and on

the part of the professors there is an equal force operating to avoid giving a "formula", rather presenting the data and permitting the listeners to interpret as they choose and draw their own conclusions. Unfortunately, many who need the information are not able to read the data and make correct interpretations.

Need Common Understanding

Sitting in the back of a room one can hear comments that do not reach the speakers up front. A frequent one is: "That guy is talking way over my head. I don't understand what he is saying." In an audience made up of diverse interests it is not always possible to present a message that can be understood clearly by everyone.

Here and there clinics are held under the sponsorship of supts. associations. In a large measure they closely parallel university conferences and utilize many of the same speakers. So far they tend to concentrate on a narrower range of topics which can be a real advantage. Some groups have discontinued having guest speakers from colleges and universities, preferring to have only fellow supts. on the program. Preliminary reports indicate something less than 100 per cent success, but the attempt is significant.

Industrial Clinics

Conferences, schools and clinics arranged and conducted by industrial interests are increasing. At these affairs there is a commendable effort to present solid educational material of a practical nature. The purpose of the gathering quite frankly is to display tools of the trade and to generate interest and orders for the lines carried by the sponsor. This is a valid and valuable approach. Speakers here can discuss products by name and thoroughly explain how the products can be used to best advantage. Such an approach can't be permitted at tax-supported institutions where strict neutrality must be observed.

An analysis of schools, field days, and meetings reveals procedures in use similar to all the types of other conferences. Each is a device bringing together people of similar interests for further education. The question is, "How effective are these gatherings in meeting the real needs of the turfgrass industry?" As the industry matures it becomes increasingly important to study our progress and to plan our conferences for the greatest possible helpfulness to those interested enough to attend.

Turf Dates

Jan. 14-18 — New Jersey turf short course, Rutgers U., New Brunswick

Jan. 25 — USGA education meeting, Biltmore Hotel, New York

Jan. 30-31 — Virginia turf conference, John Marshall Hotel, Richmond

Feb. 6-15 — 34th GCSA International conference and show, El Cortez Hotel, San Diego

Feb. 18-21 — Penn State U. turf conference University Park, Pa.

Feb. 21-22 — Minnesota GCSA conference, Minneapolis

Feb. 25-28 — Cornell U., Statler Hall, Ithaca, N.Y.

Mar. 4-6 — Midwest Regional turf conference, Purdue U., Lafayette, Ind.

Mar. 7-8 — U. of Massachusetts turf conference, Amherst, Mass.

Mar. 12-14 — Turfgrass short course, Iowa State U., Ames.

Q. We have had discussions at our club concerning the use of lime. Is it true that lime brings weeds? What are some of the advantages of using lime? Where does hydrated lime belong? (New York)

A. For many years lime was avoided on courses because it was believed that the way to control weeds was to develop very acid soils. By the time that soils were acid enough to control weeds, the grass wouldn't grow. Today we know that if it seems that "lime brings weeds" it is due to the fact that the grass is starved for nitrogen, or the grass is not the right one for the location or use. Lime and a balanced fertilizer program on a sturdy adapted grass will produce turf virtually without weeds.

Advantages of using lime are several:

1. It increases fertilizer efficiency.
2. It increases microbiological activity, thus reducing unwanted organic residue accumulations and increasing release of nutrients.
3. Both Ca and Mg are essential nutrients — calcium helps to cement cells together by linking peptic acids; magnesium is the heart of the chlorophyll molecule.
4. Lime raises the pH which stimulates nitrogen — fixing bacteria.
5. Toxicity of iron, aluminum and manganese is reduced.
6. Trace elements are released and often are carried as impurities in limestone.
7. Soil physical condition is improved, thus aiding water absorption and retention.
8. Lime is an excellent conditioner for complete mixed fertilizers.

Hydrated lime belongs in every maintenance building for emergency use during hot, humid weather. A dusting of 2 lbs. per 1,000 sq. ft. of hydrated lime can check disease.