



## Buying for the golf course

*The superintendent must use all the means at his disposal to ensure wise, economical purchasing for his club.*

By JAMES MANKA

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In 1930 golf turf receiving irrigation seldom exceeded a total of three acres at the average club. Today golfers demand tees, fairways, and greens of equal turf perfection. Supplemental irrigation requirements have increased twentyfold. The large five gallon purchase of the 1930's can hardly be contrasted to the sale of a 55 gallon drum in the 1960's.

Who is best qualified to know today's turf demands and to purchase the proper materials and supplies to meet these needs? Maintenance of the golf course and the production of high quality playing turf is the sole responsibility of the Golf Course Superintendent. Therefore, he is the only qualified individual to purchase materials and supplies for his needs to meet the desires of members.

The impact of inflation and its decrease in the purchasing power of the

monetary unit will affect all club operations. On February 14, 1966, *The Wall Street Journal* contained a feature article predicting possible price increases for many items that had held stable over the last five years. A few golf course items subject to possible increases in cost are tractors, mowers, and selected chemicals. Approximately thirty-five per cent of every greens' budget, regardless of size, is spent to purchase materials and supplies. The cunning greensmaster uses all his resourcefulness when making any club purchase. Money saved will certainly enhance his position as a monetary and turf manager.

Exclusive territory franchises and the application of state fair trade laws will restrict competitive pricing in some areas and thereby limit buying practices. Otherwise, the Golf Course Superintend-

ent will purchase supplies by one or a combination of three basic practices.

The *direct purchase* method is the most economical, whenever it is possible to buy directly. Each middleman who handles a product increases its cost. You should not forget the local distributor's position in this type of purchase or its effect when requesting repairs from the local service agent. Some items may be shipped unassembled directly from the manufacturer to the club at a reduced cost. In many areas the greensmaster may place a direct order for lime at a \$3 to \$4 per ton saving.

*Sealed bids* are mostly for purchases by municipalities, plus a few large clubs making annual purchases. All purchases in the excess of an established value usually apply to the former, and few restrictions bind the latter except credit rating. Specifications and quality of the product must be clearly defined in understandable terms on any bid request. In addition, location and type of delivery expected, financial terms of payment, method of freight charges, and responsibility of acceptance and terms for errors or mistakes should be stated. Large chemical purchases and procurement of fertilizer have proven profitable for clubs using this method.

Visits by the well-informed salesman, representing the *local supplier* and offering accurate product information, service, quality products, and knowledgeable experience are non-expendable. Purchases from this source are the backbone of the golf supply industry.

Today we are finding a few general supply industries sending poorly trained salesmen attempting to sell products, of which they have no knowledge, to qualified superintendents. Many calls are one-shot transactions with promotional gimmicks with possible sales ranging from nuts and bolts to outboard motor oil. The quick-call artist is wasting both his and the greenmaster's time.

Good reputable salesmen of established houses are most welcome by the superintendent and the club for the enjoyable monetary rewards of each.

Golf course supply sales will always be a service industry.

There are several factors affecting purchase methods. They include:

*Storage Space*—Forty tons or a car-load lot of a given fertilizer at any discounted savings would be a wasteful purchase if proper storage was lacking. An extra room added to your building area might prove valuable.

*Timing of Purchase*—If you have proper storage area, fertilizer may be purchased at varying seasonal discounts. In November some companies grant a 5 per cent discount if delivery is accepted at that time. This discount decreases to 3 per cent in January. After March 1, no seasonal discounts are allowed. Some local suppliers were offering special discounts on ten cases or more of selected fungicides for December delivery with payment deferred until January 1, 1966. The savings was approximately \$7 per case or \$70 for the ten cases.

*Credit Rating*—The greenmaster at a club with a good credit position and available cash will be assured of the standard prompt payment discount of 2 per cent. Purchases of \$30,000 discounted at 2 per cent will result in a \$600 savings or the equivalent of a foreman's salary for one month. It is the superintendent's responsibility to point out to the greens' chairman, or the party responsible, the advantages of prompt payment and the resulting savings.

*Bulk Buying*—Purchase savings on two hundred units at \$5.50 each as compared to twelve units at \$11 are self-explanatory. Bulk purchases are restricted only by lack of available funds and proper storage space. When comparing bulk rates everyone must be sure they are speaking of the same product with the same quality.

*Freight Charges*—Most items purchased from the local supplier are shipped prepaid and then charges are added to the bill later. Some large purchases that are shipped directly may be billed F.O.B. The golf course superintendent must always inquire in advance about freight charges when pricing items.

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**Unit Price**—A large corporation purchasing agent might be forced to consider four units to the left of the decimal point when making a successful purchase. In contrast, the superintendent very seldom has to consider beyond the hundredth's column when buying. Both men are buying quality and service and neither is usually restricted to awarding a sale to the low bidder.

**Service**—The original cost of a piece of machinery is only a starting point of its expense. If equipment is idle because of lack of parts or becomes an outmoded model, long depreciated, with parts not available when needed, the cost is magnified. Service outlets take a second thought about serving equipment knowingly purchased from a competitor at a discount rate. The superintendent must know his supplier as well as the type of service he offers. Actions and not promises by the salesman can often mean a manpower decision.

**Range of Equipment**—Today with the high unit cost of major equipment, the progressive superintendent must consider the number of different operations a given piece of equipment is able to perform. A tractor that is restricted to only mowing operations must be compared to the tractor that might pull mowing units, contain a power take-off unit, operate as a grader, pull a turf aerator, serve as a front-end loader or applier of fertilizer. Therefore, it is necessary to select equipment best suited to needs with the desired efficiency. Many leading equipment companies are trying to develop more interchangeable and useful pieces of machinery.

**Quality**—The adverse agronomic conditions under which the grass plant must fight for survival and success demands the use of products of only the highest quality. Two materials may contain the same percentages of active ingredients but the impurities of one mixture might harm the turf while there might be no reaction to the second. Nothing can be saved by the purchase of second rate products.

In 1963 a few southern turf managers purchased non-certified Seaside bent at

what was considered a bargain price. Shortly after overseeding greens with this seed, a rosette-type weed appeared causing many hours of hand labor for its removal. Certified seed properly labelled, as required by law, and reflecting germination, purity, and weed seeds is always the best buy.

As an aid to the New York greenmasters for example, our friend or enemy, *Poa annua*, has been declared a noxious weed in that state. This seed law may soon carry to other states.

**Club Members**—In isolated cases a few club members will be of aid to the greens superintendent in purchasing various supplies. Though this situation will present problems and decisions in public relations for the superintendent, it enhances his buying position if properly utilized.

The purchasing practices of any golf course superintendent are not necessarily limited by the desires of the golf club, but by monetary funds available. No part of management makes a greater conscientious effort to secure the largest return for each dollar spent than the greens superintendent. It will always be impossible to have a champagne golf course on a beer pocketbook no matter how resourceful monetary funds are expended. The golf course superintendent will always be the best qualified purchaser with the funds that are available.

### Sources of Information

The 37th Annual Turfgrass Conference and Show sponsored by the Golf Course Superintendents Association was held recently in Kansas City, Missouri. Over 2,000 greenmasters employed throughout the United States attended the educational sessions and visited displays of the latest equipment and products. A convention of this nature affords all attending a chance to shop around for new ideas, to suggest changes or improvements, and to gain first-hand knowledge from the company representatives. In addition, an interchange of ideas relating to management and buying practices is possible among the superintendents from the various areas. It is important that the greensmaster keep abreast of the latest changes and im-

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provements when spending the club's money.

Many locally affiliated chapters of the Golf Course Superintendents Association sponsor annual field days within their specific area. Local suppliers are given the opportunity to demonstrate the latest equipment under actual field conditions. The local field days present the greens chairmen and other interested club officials an excellent chance to observe different equipment in operation.

The influx of trade publications has greatly increased at all clubs in the last few years. Several trade journals print special annual editions that feature a *Buyers Guide*.

Local supply houses assemble colorful, informative, and practical catalogues of the materials they sell. Moreover, they obtain information supplied directly by the manufacturers as well as the local price quotation to aid the purchaser.

*The Wall Street Journal* until recently, carried a feature column entitled *The Commodity Letter*. This article gave the reader an insight to possible pricing trends of specific materials common to everyday needs. Since the spring of 1964, quicksilver has doubled in price because of increased chlorine production, wider use in missile programs, and labor strife in Spain. Therefore, all products containing mercury have been subjected to a large price boost. Also, the possible future price variations for grass seed were often listed. Lead arsenate, a widely used turf chemical, has increased in price over 15 per cent since January of 1965.

Two recent issues of *Business Week* carried articles regarding price index changes relating to copper and sulphur. Factors of supply and demand have been responsible for price hikes in these basic elements. Chemical compounds using these base materials will increase in price in the future. •

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