



Buying for the golf course

Foresight, frugality and keeping your club's interests uppermost in your mind are the keystones of prudent purchasing.

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One of the responsibilities of a golf course superintendent is the purchasing of course equipment and materials. This responsibility should be solely his, for who better understands the soils, grasses, maintenance practices, and membership demands on the golf course than the superintendent. One can rest assured that the progressive superintendent is a sharp individual who will demand and receive value for every dollar spent. If he has a budget to work from, he realizes that the money he saves on one item means more he can spend on other things.

Especially during these periods of inflation when prices are ever soaring, it is

important to receive full value for money spent. Every year for the past decade when I have presented my yearly maintenance budget to the Board of Governors, it has increased steadily—in fact, from 1957 to 1967, our budget has increased 30 per cent, or an annual increase of three per cent. And there is no apparent end in sight with spiraling wages and costs of supplies.

Spring is the time of the year with greatest activity—when golfers are raring to resume their golf and nature is about to burst out into full glory. Dues are being paid and, thus, those orders that were delayed can now be placed.

This is the time of year when the superintendent does his greatest amount of purchasing. No doubt he has attended field days and equipment demonstrations during the previous fall; has formulated his plans during the winter for next season's operations; has presented his budget with the above thoughts in mind; has attended the GCSA International Turf Grass Conference and Show to learn the latest in maintenance practices and see the new equipment. Now he is ready to have the best golf course ever.

There are many ways that a golf course superintendent can be prudent and frugal in his purchasing of supplies and equipment, and, perhaps, some of my experiences and practices will be helpful.

Discount buying

Winter Purchasing—Many companies especially fertilizer concerns, in order to move materials out of their warehouses and keep their plants operating, offer substantial discounts on deliveries taken during the winter months. Savings can amount to five per cent to three per cent (decreasing as the winter draws to a close). This means a saving of \$100 to \$150 on a 30-ton order, which, in turn, means that you can purchase that extra 18" rotary you were thinking about, or an additional three cases of thiram.

Such purchasing, though, requires space, and fortunate are those superintendents that have ample room in their maintenance buildings for such supplies. It is false economy to make such purchases if they have to be stored in damp areas or where they can be damaged and deteriorate. Why move equipment outside to the ravages of weather just to take advantage of such savings? Instead, make the maximum use of all area available, and, when constructing your new building, incorporate storage areas in your plans. Along some of the walls of our buildings, we have constructed three-tier shelves of 4x4's with 2x3 planking where we store a large amount of our small equipment and supplies, thus saving a lot of floor space. This fact, along with

efficient equipment storage, enables us to take advantage of winter purchasing at better prices.

When price is right

Delayed Deliveries—Prudent purchasing also can be accomplished by buying when the price is right for future delivery. This is especially true when you anticipate or know of an increase in price. This may apply to new equipment.

During the slow season of the year, many golf course supply houses will offer bargains when you place your order then but take delivery when you need it. They will even guarantee that if the price lowers they will pass the savings on to you, but no increase if the price increases. This is logical, for they in turn can anticipate their needs and purchase at the right time. Substantial savings can be made by thus formulating your needs ahead of time.

Bulls and bears

Market Prices—This does not mean that you should play the stock market, but merely implies that by keeping a watchful eye on prices of various supplies you can reap a real harvest. For instance, seed prices depend on the harvest and on demand and supply. In my budget this year, I am requesting 1500 pounds of bent grass seed mixture and quoted last year's price of 90¢ per pound. This was offered to me the other day for twenty cents less—a saving of \$300 which would purchase an additional 23 tons of lime. It would be to my advantage to purchase now—but what if seed prices should drop even more? Seriously, prices for such items as seed and mercuries and other chemicals call for careful research and considered decisions.

Buy economy size

Bulk Buying—Naturally, you will receive a better price if you purchase 10 tons of fertilizer instead of one ton, or 10 cases of thiram instead of one, or a 55 gal. drum of insecticide or fungicide instead of a five gal. or a one gal. pail, but do you always take advantage of such bulk purchasing? This is another

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example of when you need to figure your seasonal needs in advance to profit.

On the other hand, do not buy 10 ton if you only need five ton, nor a 55 gal. drum if you only need 30 gals. Again this is false economy. I know one person, though, who prefers all his materials in small packages or containers so as to have less waste and pilferage, and also to simplify his measuring and mixing. However, this is not necessary, if you have accurate scales and measures, keep your supplies concentrated and not spread all over the place, and have tight control on use of same.

As we purchase our materials and supplies at Winged Foot, they are immediately put on inventory and not charged against our budget until used. A monthly inventory of all materials and supplies is made, so, along with our maintenance records, this gives us absolute control over all supplies.

Buy now, pay later

Year End Purchasing—I have found it very advantageous to make some purchases at the end of the season for next year's use. This, of course, is possible only where you have money left in the budget for such action, or where these supplies are inventoried, as in our case, and then charged against your budget when used. In many instances, concerns have overstocked or want to clean out their warehouses for new stock, so will make you an attractive offer. This is applicable to equipment—receiving as much as 20 per cent to 25 per cent discount—so do not minimize the savings you can make in such a manner.

Get the price

Bids—We are all familiar with bids or quotes, and I believe we all do this more or less with all our purchases, whatever type they may be. Private clubs do not go into the matter of sealed bids as thoroughly as municipalities, but it is folly not to get two or more competitive prices on all items that you intend to pur-

chase. Granted that many of the items, especially equipment, used on a golf course are of a specialized nature, and are either fair-traded or the competition is not to keen. Limited as it may be, there is always rivalry around, so the superintendent must compare, analyze, trade-in old equipment, and justify his purchases.

In many cases the competition *is* there and the superintendent is responsible for getting the most value at the lowest price. This does not mean sacrificing quality for quantity. Rather, when you receive your bids and make your comparisons, be sure that suppliers are all quoting on the *same* standards.

One company may be quoting on blue tag seed with high purity and germination while his competitor is quoting on poor quality seed. Also, do not discount the value of the guarantee or service that goes along with such purchases. One outfit might offer a low price on a piece of equipment, but, once delivered, you never see him again. When you compare suppliers, be sure to take into consideration both quality and service.

Some years ago when we were in the market for a tractor equipped with a backhoe and loader, I had six major tractor companies bidding on this item. One salesman said "all backhoes will dig a hole." We listed in table form the ratings and all the advantages and disadvantages of each piece of equipment. My final decision was not for the lowest priced tractor nor the highest, but one we felt was well worth the cost. This same policy was used in purchasing a chain saw this past fall. Quotes were received and the chain saws actually demonstrated with the result that we have a terrific value.

It may seem from some of the above that the superintendent should buy with the foresight of a clairvoyant and the calculating mind of a frugal New Englander! But what it all comes down to is: *Be careful* in your purchasing and always keep the interest of your club uppermost in your mind. •