

# Turf Product Prices: Will You Be Caught Off Guard?

By FRED V. GRAU

Look for a sharp  
rise in the prices of  
high-quality seeds.  
Fertilizer prices will  
also swing upward

**A**s the sun swings north once more and the peepers in the swamps herald the re-birth of nature, many superintendents begin to figure out how much seed of various kinds they will need to repair the scars of winter and disease. They look at the budget and run their finger down to the item, marked "seeds." Was enough leeway allowed? Is the price of bent up this spring? What kind of crop was produced?

In the seed business we can tell what has happened as of this date, but to predict what will happen three or four months from now—well, clairvoyants we are not. When these lines were written, the harvest had been virtually completed with losses far less than in 1968 when unexpected rainstorms soaked the windrowed grass. The subsequent sprouting ruined a large proportion of the seed and as a consequence, prices rose.

Blue Tag Certified Penncross bent for greens (Putting Green Quality) dropped about \$2 a pound between November 1, 1968, and the same date in 1969. This is significant because there is no uncertified Penncross (and never again will be) and it is costing the grower more to produce this high-quality stock. It is difficult to interpret demand, but it appears that the need for this seed holds steady.

Merion Kentucky bluegrass exhibits the sharpest rise in prices from a year ago, especially in those classes that are "*Poa annua* free." The sod industry is demanding this high-quality seed. With the heavy drain on available supplies, the price structure is affected. Most bluegrasses have held steady. In general the picture is good. There are plentiful supplies of most varieties and budgets should be able to cover whatever is needed.

Newer superior varieties still are in short supply and their cost will be high compared to Merion, common, Park, Delta, Prato and the like, particularly Fylking and Pennstar. Last year everyone was sold out of Fylking early in the season. This year the few thousand pounds of Pennstar were sold before the growers had finished cleaning the seed. As I see it, price is not going to stop many turfgrass managers from using the better varieties. With better performance of the grass and with better machinery to get the seed in contact with the soil (scarifier-seeders), one needs to use lower rates per acre to get satisfactory results.

The fine-leaf fescues took a jump clear across the board with not one declining in price compared to a year ago. Demand is strong and yields have suffered as a result of the anti-pollution measures taken against burning. Burning is the growers' way of eliminating trash, insects, weed seeds and diseases. No one is quite sure as to what will happen if fields cannot be burned now and then.

The sturdy tall fescues are up significantly in price. I see a joint effect of reduced yields and heavier demand. Highways, parks and golf courses

*Continued*

draw heavily on stocks of these seeds. I look for prices on these fescues to hold up and perhaps increase a little more.

Penncross is an example of one that will cost less compared to this time a year ago. All other bentgrasses are sharply up in price, whether certified or uncertified. A situation of this kind is not easy to explain. At this point I'm afraid we will just have to accept it.

There is little change detected in the price of the ryegrasses, even the improved varieties (Pelo, Manhattan, NK-100). Last year there wasn't enough seed of the improved types to go around, but the price structure has not been visibly affected. One of the most recent of the improved ryegrasses (it hasn't even been named yet) got off to a bad start because delivery was delayed in transit so that the seed didn't get into the ground in time.

Redtop is not a big item but it is interesting that the price is up sharply over a year ago. There has been great difficulty in getting good redtop seed free from yarrow. This could be a deciding factor in the higher price for this so-called "nurse" grass. It could result in less redtop in mixtures.

I have not had any figures on bermudagrass seed, but from all indications, there isn't much of a change. I can see an expansion of the use of hulled bermudagrass seed in the direction of courses on the N-S "grey zone." The scarifier-seeders make it possible to get seed effectively into contact with the soil without interrupting play. We might look for a slight rise in this warm-season grass.

In grass seeds it is good business to know your needs early and to place your order with your seedsman as early as possible. This helps him to schedule shipments from grower or broker and could result in significant savings

## BUYING TIPS FOR TURF MATERIALS

When buying for the golf course, there are two points on which every superintendent should be clear, no matter how the buying is done: 1) have legal authority to make the purchase; 2) be ready, willing and able to justify cost and material purchased within the allotted funds.

Putting material out to bid is not a common practice, at least not at private courses; however, it has some advantages. It is obvious that a savings can result by accepting the lowest bid. Less understood are some indirect advantages.

Large orders put to bid early in the season, or off season, are assured of prompt attention and delivery, sometimes at special discounts. (This also applies to non bid orders.) Some houses specialize in certain materials, and grouping of items in this category almost always results in low prices. The two big divisions are those which specialize in chemicals and fertilizers, and those which deal in equipment and sundry items.

Writing up an order, if done properly, will require the aid of catalogs, trade magazines and other published material, include an inventory of materials on hand and judgment of past performance of materials. The end result is better planning and a better informed course superintendent.

It is important to bear in mind that the low bid is not always the best buy. Final judgment should also take into consideration the reputation of the bidder, the quality of the material and the reliability of delivery. In a word—service. Many superintendents also place a premium on the personal attention they receive from a particular company representative.

With operating costs at an all time high, the labor supply marginal at best, and the weather as unreliable as ever, purchasing for the golf course is one area in which the superintendent controls the ball. Swing easy and follow through.

—Bill Smart

to the user. Last minute rush orders can throw monkey wrenches into well-oiled machines.

### Fertilizer trends

For several years there has been unprecedented expansion in fertilizer mining and manufacturing facilities. The main impetus came in the name of "Fight Poverty" and "Food for the Starving." Now there is a surplus of food and fertilizer, both of which have been given away or sold at or below cost. A change is in the making. Production costs are up, labor demands higher wages, transportation costs may be hiked 10 to 11 per cent, money for plant

expansion and maintenance cost more. The end result will be higher prices for nearly all fertilizers simply because no one can continue to sell goods at or below cost and stay in business.

An unfortunate situation is that which prompts a dealer to cut prices as a way to get more business. This works for a time, but it ends up with no one making the profit; they must stay in business.

Fertilizer users should be aware of the conditions which have led to such low fertilizer prices. By the same token we should not be surprised when prices begin to reach a more normal level—normal as related to costs and prices of other commodities. □