

Off The Fringe

Business briefs

Bayer, Aventis negotiating

At press time, Aventis of Strasbourg, France, and Schering AG of Berlin Germany were continuing negotiations exclusively with Bayer AG about the sale of Aventis Crop-Science. Aventis holds a 76 percent interest in the crop protection and crop production business, while Schering holds 24 percent. The acquisition would be the largest in Bayer's history. The company wants to expand its crop protection business.

In other Bayer AG news, Paradigm Genetics and Bayer AG extended and expanded their commercial partnership for herbicide discovery and development for another five years. Under the new agreement, Paradigm will receive up to \$30 million including milestone payments, as well as success fees for all products that reach the market.

Canadian court upholds ban

The Supreme Court of Canada ruled in June that municipalities have the right to ban the residential use of pesticides. The court dismissed the appeal of two Canadian lawn-care companies against the municipality of Hudson, Quebec, which was the first Canadian municipality to outlaw pesticides on lawns in 1991.

Royster-Clark buys Agrilience outlets

Arden Hills, Minn.-based Royster-Clark Group will close a deal with Agrilience to acquire its Agro Distribution South and ProSource One businesses.

BASF predicts stagnant income

BASF AG predicted it would not see any increase in its operating income in the second

Briefs continue on page 16

H-2B Far From Perfect

BUT U.S. LABOR FIRM

TRYING TO MAKE IT BETTER

By Ron Hall

The U.S. government's H-2B visa program allows employers who can't attract local labor to recruit and employ unskilled, seasonal foreign workers. The majority of these workers are recruited in Mexico and Latin America. Although the U.S. green industry has become increasingly dependent on these workers, the H-2B program is far from perfect.

Many first-time H2B laborers arrive at their U.S. employer's office with few job skills. They speak little or no English, are unfamiliar with turf equipment and have little experience with U.S. laws and customs.

"If we don't get our act together with this H-2B, it could be in big trouble," says Jeff West, who operates a Michigan-based labor solutions firm that places H2B workers in U.S. industries.

West's firm is improving H2B. After meeting with West, Guanajuato State in central Mexico, an industrial city of about 450,000 citizens, implemented worker training programs. West has met with officials in other Mexican states, too, and they're interested in developing similar programs.

West's program, taught by professional bilingual educators, requires worker candidates to attend two weeks of classroom and hands-on instruction. They receive lessons in conversational English and U.S. laws and customs, and learn how to operate and maintain commercial mowers, thanks in part to equipment donations from John Deere. The workers are tested at the end of the training sessions.

About 300 potential employees were trained by the state agency, and West believes they stand a better chance of becoming productive green

industry workers. Also, he feels they're less likely to go AWOL from their U.S. employers (become "illegal") to seek better pay in construction or other U.S. industries, one of H2B's not-so-secret dirty little secrets.

"If these men spend two weeks of their time here, eight hours a day and without getting paid, that tells me they're serious about wanting to work in the United States," West says.

West admits his motives for promoting the program aren't entirely altruistic. Through his labor contracting firm, GTO International in Whitmore Lake, Mich., he says he expects to place at least 100 of the trained laborers with U.S. green industry businesses.

Hall is editor of Athletic Turf, Golf-dom's sister publication.

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