In a Word — Resourceful

Superintendents put spreaders to many uses

BY PETER BLAIS

Versatility is the name of the game as superintendents seek chemical spreaders that will both apply a variety of materials and are easy to use, according to manufacturers.

Groundscontrol Products manufactures spreaders for fertilizer, seed, lime, chemical, salt and sand applications, says company President Larry Middleton.

"Superintendents are looking for something that will do a light topdressing, but also an all-around machine that can do other things," Middleton explains. "They use it to spread fertilizer and seed in the summer. But then in the winter, they can use the same machine to spread a sand/salt mixture as a de-icer for their parking lots and driveways."

Groundscontrol Products manufactures the TB750, a 750- to 1,000-pound capacity machine. It also makes a 300-pound capacity machine, and Middleton says the company can manufacture machines with other weight capacities.

Middleton says superintendents have asked about using the TB750 for applying compost.

"This machine will spread anything that is dry-flowable," he says. "We offer vibrators to go with it if the material is damp. We also offer screens to break up the material and give it some air-dry time." The units range from $525 to $1,700.

Monroe Tufline makes two pull-behind spreaders, the SB150 and SB300, with 300-pound and 600-pound capacities, respectively. Larger-capacity models can be special-ordered. Both ground-driven units can broadcast materials up to 35 feet to the right and to the left, or 17.5 feet in both directions at the same time, says Nick Tarlton, Monroe Tufline's marketing research and development manager. The units come standard with a 1 7/8-inch ball hitch, although different-sized hitches are available.

Originally designed for seeding and fertilizing, the SB series can also apply gypsum or lime during the growing season as well as salt and sand on roadways during the winter. It works best with granulized and pelletized materials and less well with powders.

"It has a system so you can disengage the gear box and the only thing that turns are the wheels," Tarlton explains. "That's helpful if you need to travel a good distance around the course. The disengagement mechanism is activated by a pull pin and results in less wear and tear on the unit. The agitator, agitator plate and gear box lie still. Only the tires move. If you have fertilizer in there, you don't want something turning the whole time you are transporting that material."

The disengagement unit was the result of Tarlton's surveys of superintendents. Those investigations also revealed superintendents' desires for a mechanism to open and close the hopper from the driver's seat, something Tarlton expects to be available on Monroe Tufline products in 2003.

Efforts to minimize chemical use by increasing organic materials has led many superintendents to begin using Turfco spreaders to apply everything from composts to organic fertilizers, says Turfco Vice President Scott Kinkead.

"In some countries, they've banned the use of chemicals [on courses] entirely," he says. "Superintendents we've talked to [there] are trying to get the same results using organic materials. Our Mete-R-Matic models, with the patented chevron belt, are being used for a variety of compost applications. Superintendents also use them for lime, gypsum, crumb rubber and compost sludges."

Turfco unveiled its chevron design in 1993.

"Traditionally, spreading a solid, wet material or one with organic qualities has been difficult," Kinkead says. "The chevron design allows superintendents to apply wet materials."

Peter Thompson, Lesco's senior product manager for equipment, says the company has traditionally sold three types of spreaders: push/rotary, push/drop and Vicon pendulum spreaders. Lesco's rotary spreaders have 80-pound-capacity hoppers and are overall general-purpose spreaders. Drop spreaders work best for fertilizing or overseeding applications on greens and tees. The pendulum spreaders come with 600- to 950-pound capacities and work best on larger turf areas, like fairways.

Lesco introduced a new rotary drop spreader this spring, Thompson says. The Lesco Roto/Drop Spreader is a combination rotary spreader with a drop panel in the rear. It is particularly suited to trim work and keeps materials falling on their intended targets.

Lesco also markets the Perma Green Supreme, a hybrid spreader/sprayer with a hopper for dry materials and a small tank for spraying liquid agents. ■

Blais is a free-lance writer from North Yarmouth, Maine.