

The great Satchel Paige used to say, "Don't look back. Something might be gaining on you." Nonetheless, I suppose I can't entirely avoid looking

back for our year-end issue, so let's just sum up the 2003 timeline this way:

Nasty spring. Lame economy. Rounds down. Budget pressure. Decent autumn. Recovery coming? Happy Holidays!

Thankfully, 2003 is just about history. Now let's shine up the old crystal ball and see what lies ahead in 2004. Here are my predictions for the year to come:

Poor Richard I ain't, but ...

Folks, we're due for a decent weather year. Nothing scientific, but it's time Mother Nature gives the business a break. The swami predicts a mild winter and a string of warm dry weekends next spring. (Hey, it could happen.)

The planets are aligning ...

... and so are industry suppliers. The Pursell Farms effort (including Toro, Syngenta, etc.) and the John Deere OneSource initiative are the most prominent examples of seemingly diverse industry companies collaborating. But look for more strategic partnerships next year. Why? The overall market is perceived as weak, and companies are trying innovative ways to grow their share of the same pie. If they can offer one-stop services or package their value with another partner, it can help them gain more of your business.

Growing trends

According to a *Golfdom* study earlier this year, the use of PGRs surged 34 percent from 2001 to 2003. There's no reason to think that trend won't continue. Growth regulators are becoming the Silly Putty management tool: Superintendents find something new and different to do with them every day. Tank mixing for *Poa* management is catching fire and will surely grow more as university and field trial data continue to come in.

Consolidation consensus

My friends in the chemical business say one final round of consolidation is imminent and

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BY PAT JONES



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will likely involve three or four of the industry's smaller manufacturers being rolled up into one big player. DuPont's decision to re-activate in the turf market by purchasing the rest of post-patent marketer Griffin LLC may be the trigger that spurs this last big rollup of companies.

But that's not the only consolidation talk I'm hearing. Suppliers are increasingly balking at the seemingly endless number of requests for funding from associations, foundations, coalitions and other interest groups whose missions overlap. One major industry executive recently told me, "We're going to 'encourage' these folks to merge their efforts by allocating our funds a lot more selectively. We're tired of the redundancy."

Aesthetic doesn't necessarily mean pretty

The worst trend we'll see next year will be attempts by communities — particularly liberal far Northern cities and counties — to ban "aesthetic" uses of pesticides. The model for these efforts comes from Canada where, because they lack a federal pre-emption law, antipesticide activists have aggressively gone after lawn care applicators and, in some cases, golf courses for using turf chemicals.

Even though the United States has a federal "pre-emption" law that seemingly prohibits communities from overriding national or state laws, the "aesthetic use" language is already creeping in to proposals that limit phosphorous in fertilizers or prevent public spending on pesticides for parks and municipal courses.

In short, after several quiet years on the environmental regulation front, look for local battles aplenty next year.

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