

Off The Fringe

Standardizing Sprig Measurement Not Easy

DIFFICULTY IS COMING UP WITH A PRACTICAL WAY OF DOING IT

By Peter Blais

Speaking at a recent Alabama Turfgrass Conference, architect John LaFoy said the golf industry needs to change the way bermudagrass sprigs are ordered and measured to ensure that new golf courses and renovations are built correctly.

"There is no standardized measurement," lamented the former American Society of Golf Course Architects president. "In the South, you order 600 bushels per acre. But you have no idea how many sprigs are [actually] going down."

Why? Two reasons.

First is the definition of a bushel. Most turfgrass growers base their de-



liveries on the U.S. bushel, also commonly called a Georgia bushel, which measures 1.24 cubic feet. But some areas of the South Central United States make deliveries based on the so-called Texas bushel, which measures closer to 0.4 cubic feet, roughly a third of the size of the standard U.S. bushel.

"From the golf course contractor's position, standardization would be

good," said Jim Lyles, vice president of irrigation with Austin, Texas-based course builder Golf Works. "If someone is bidding based on a U.S. bushel, his bid process will be three times as high as someone else's. So he might bid \$300,000 on a job while someone else bids \$100,000. The guy with the lower bid will probably get the job. But whether he bid what the owner and architect wanted is the question.

If you want to have accurate bids and be able to compare apples to apples, that's why you need standards."

Agreeing on whether to make the U.S., Georgia, Texas or some other measurement the dimensional standard would probably be easier than solving the second problem — for example, how bushels of sprigs are packaged.

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ket and you use beans, wheat or something like that, you get a consistent level," said John Foster, president of West Coast Turf, based in Palm Desert, Calif. "But when you put something in as fluffy as a stolon [bermudagrass sprig], it depends on how much the material is compressed."

Some growers have packing standards that call for filling a bag and shaking it twice, Foster noted.

"That seems difficult and bizarre to me, to measure something by two shakes of a bag," he said. "Other people might shove it down and put a lot more compression so they get more stolons in there."

Whether sprigs are washed or cleaned of dirt before delivery can affect how many can be packed in a bushel. The type of bermudagrass also determines the number of bermudagrass stolons per bushel.

"For example, Tifeagle tends to be clumpier once it's harvested than Tifdwarf," said John Holmes, a salesman for Southern Turf Nurseries of Elberta, Ala. "A bushel of Tifeagle would have fewer live sprigs than a bushel of Tifdwarf because it's clumpier. That's the type of difficulty you encounter in standardizing. You might get everyone to agree that a certain volume is the standard. But it boils down to how many live plants you have in that bushel."

Most agree with Catechee GC superintendent Buck Workman. "I don't

know what the best way would be, but standardization would be good," said the turf manager at the Hartwell, Ga., course. "In the construction process, it would be helpful."

Given the many variables in developing a standard, the difficulty is coming up with a practical way of doing it.

"I'm not optimistic about the industry developing a different measuring standard," Foster said. "It's been talked about for years. You just do the best job you can and hope people realize the importance of quality."

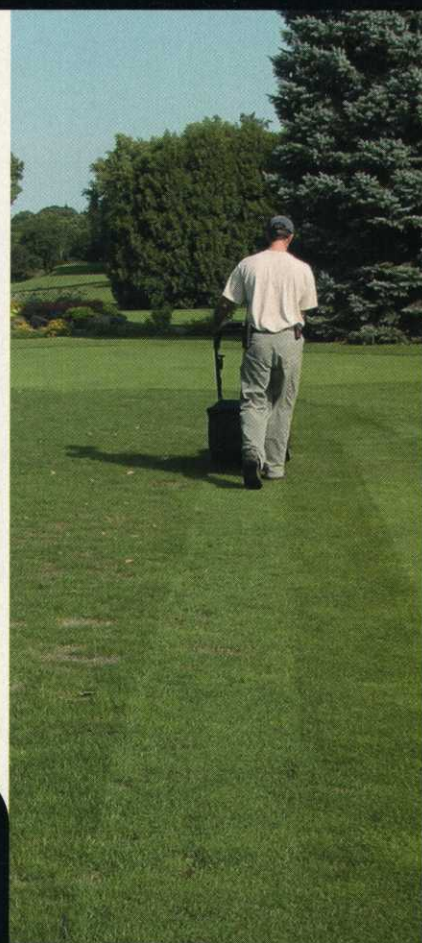
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