

Field of Research

BAYER'S HAS PLENTY OF ROOM FOR R&D – AND THEN SOME

By Ron Hall

Bayer hosted Green Industry editors at its Bayer Environmental Science (BES) technical research facility in Clayton, N.C., this past summer. At 281 acres, it's believed to be the largest single site in the United States devoted to developing and testing turfgrass and structural pest control products.

In addition to several acres devoted to turf plots, the site includes a two-hole golf course with bentgrass greens (three additional holes were to be added in the summer). Noticeable on the grounds was a row of shiny new

John Deere turf equipment. BES is field-testing Deere mowers and other turf maintenance units there, as well. The Deere turf business is located in nearby Raleigh.

Eventually, the golf course will have nine holes. BES plans to hire a turf manager to help manage the site.

"Any company that wants to be a major player in this business needs to have a facility like Clayton," said Don Myers, Chipco product development manager for herbicides and PGRs.

Players? That's a short list indeed. Bayer, because of consolidation within the specialty chemical business, can literally count its turf competitors on one hand. BES itself is a blend of former Bayer and Aventis business organizations.

Marketing Director Jim Fetter

acknowledged that the current economic climate could be better, but he pointed to the BES research farm as evidence of the company's long-term commitment to turf — and its conviction that the market will continue to grow.

The Clayton site will be used to test new products, but much of the activity there will also focus on finding ways to add value to the chemistry that Bayer has already developed or obtained through acquisitions.

One of the biggest challenges facing BES, he added, will be "sorting out all the brands" now under its umbrella, and finding a common voice within the turf market for them along with its strong Bayer and Chipco lines.

"Both have been around a long time," Fetter said.

Hall is editor of Landscape Management, Golfdom's sister publication.

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