

Recently, I found myself with a rare bit of spare time on my hands. So like any other normal person would do, I reached for my dictionary. My curiosity had been getting the best of me lately, and I needed some clarification about this highly specialized field I'm in. I mean, what happened along the way? When did everything change, and who changed it?

You may or may not know a little about me by now, but I'm kind of a stickler for tradition. I'm envious of our brothers and sisters across the pond who simply load up sand from the nearest beach, apply it to their greens and then broom the shells off.

This creates some confusion for me when I hear about people grinding front rollers on their walking mowers to better accommodate .0-something mowing heights. (I'll say no more here in regard to the battle for the fastest greens. That would be too easy.)

It would seem to me we're elevating our specialization and thus elevating our stress levels when we take on these kinds of practices. This makes the problems we face self-inflicted, doesn't it?

So please forgive me if I'm wrong, but all of a sudden it dawned on me: Isn't being a superintendent of a golf course a lot like growing grass? Is this a basic tenet that we find ourselves straying away from — not seeing the golf course through all that grass?

So back to my dictionary. The first thing I decided to look up was agronomy — just what makes agronomy so special that you need to get a four-year degree in it in order to grow golf course grass?

Merriam-Webster online defines agronomy as “a branch of agriculture dealing with field-crop production and soil management.”

OK, I can go along with that. Our golf course turf is our field crop, and soil management is, well, soil management. So if agronomy is a branch of agriculture, I couldn't help but to follow that trail.

Merriam-Webster defines agriculture as “the science, art or practice of cultivating the soil, producing crops and raising livestock, and in varying degrees, the preparation and marketing of the resulting products.”

Hey, I'm Just Farming Through

BY JIM BLACK



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To me, this was surprising. I had always thought that agronomy was the heart and soul of golf course care. I thought that agronomy was where the “science” and “art” came in, making golf course maintenance that much more than just agriculture.

But according to *Merriam-Webster*, it's vice-versa. It seems that agronomy wouldn't even exist without the science, art, soil cultivation and even the marketing of the resulting product involved with agriculture. So are we really just agriculturalists?

By now some of you may be missing the point of this rambling, which is: Has anybody else given any thought to the fact that we may just be overspecializing ourselves?

Is there really anything wrong with our occupation being agricultural by nature, or do we have to beat our chests and cock-a-doodle-doo to raise our self-importance?

Don't get me wrong. I respect those who have had the opportunity and the resources to attend more schooling than my public golf self, and achieve different milestones — agronomists, private clubs, tour courses and the like.

But don't forget that those different milestones you've made are just that — different. Make a mental note that different is not necessarily better. Believe me, I've been looked down on by enough private country-club superintendents to know. All it takes is 60 seconds with someone who thinks he's better than you to know he's not.

So after all that definition seeking and contemplating, I turned the pages of my trusty, dusty dictionary and, just for the fun of it, looked up farming. The words there brought a smile to my face. They said, “The practice of agriculture.”

Hmmm. Mind if I farm through?

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