

# Shades Of Green

■ OPINION

**I**t's been 10 years since I hung up my superintendent's hat and began a new career in association management. In some ways not much has changed.

I'm still an advocate for healthy turf, but government regulations on chemicals and water drastically change the way superintendents conduct their business.

But change is inevitable, and how we handle it measures our success. Change must also be embraced by the rest of the golf industry, especially by the golfers who expect so much and often don't give much back to the game itself.

Our volunteer superintendent members and association executives from all levels engage in the endless debates with regulators, politicians and the media on water restrictions, fertilizer bans and pesticide cancellations, and we need help.

It amazes me that golf course superintendents have inherited the mantle of responsibility to fight for and preserve all the resources a golf course needs to remain competitive and profitable in today's tight market.

We raise our voices, serve on task forces and attend commission and council meetings. Where are the golf course architects, owners, builders, general managers and influential golfers, including the superstars? We appreciate the few that have taken responsibility for the growth and preservation of the game, but not very many have stepped up.

It is ironic that superintendents, whose job security is often the most fragile, are the ones charged with defending and negotiating water-use permits and initiating environmental stewardship programs. Is it only the superintendents who see the changing world in which we live?

Doing more with less and learning to live with occasional brown patches in the deep rough and yellowing fairway mounds is going to be a way of life during prolonged droughts and fewer pest-control products, which brings me to turfgrass research.

The advances in turfgrass management are mainly the result of research across the whole industry, including broad technical advancements in equipment and products from the R&D labs of large companies. But the successful local turf

## Are Vendor-backed Studies Spoiled?

BY JOEL JACKSON



ACADEMIC RESEARCH  
WOULD HAVE MORE  
VALIDITY IF IT WAS  
FUNDED BY WORKING  
PROFESSIONALS LIKE  
YOU AND ME

management advancements come from your state university turf science programs. They are well-suited to test and evaluate the best ways to grow and manage the typical turf varieties under your regional conditions.

How is this research funded? In many cases the researchers must seek funding from product manufacturers. State budgets don't provide much direct money for applied problem-solving research, much less long-range basic research. And university presidents aren't too keen on spending very much on turfgrass either.

The problem with companies funding research, especially in the use of pesticides or even water use, is that the activists then claim the results are slanted in favor of the donor (even though they can't seem to see that the same rigor should apply in their own studies).

The point is that golfers must give funds for golf course turfgrass and environmental research. If every golfer annually donated 25 cents a round and every golf club budgeted a modest line item of at least \$500, our universities would have significant funding to conduct important studies that would benefit not only the enjoyment of the game but would also help protect the environment.

We must be ready to accept the results of the research and make adjustments to our expectations of what a golf course should look like in the future. Color should become of secondary importance to playability. Through well-funded peer-reviewed research, golf courses might be able to have both, but more important is that they be considered community assets instead of targets for skeptics.

---

*Certified superintendent Joel Jackson is executive director of the Florida GCSA.*