



# PGRs Prevail

About three of four turfgrass managers rely on growth regulators for better conditions and labor savings

BY DAVID FRABOTTA, SENIOR EDITOR

**B**usiness for plant growth regulators is booming. Once viewed as a luxury among superintendents with large budgets less than a decade ago, the chemical innovation has offered superintendents ways to produce healthier plants, denser turfgrass, greener color and overall more consistent conditions for golfers.

Subsequently, many turfgrass managers are using PGRs more readily than they did just a few years ago.

"PGRs are really used by close to 75 percent of golf courses at least on tees and greens," says John Spaulding, product manager for PBI/Gordon. "And many are using them on roughs and other areas of the golf course."

Once relegated to a part of most herbicide budgets, they've earned their own line item in the budgeting process. Demand, in large part, is being fueled by golfer expectations. PGRs allow superintendents to maintain

shorter mowing heights on greens because they reduce plant stress. And fewer clippings in fairways means fewer clumps inhibiting a golfer's lie. Their good track record has prompted many to start using PGRs darn near wall to wall.

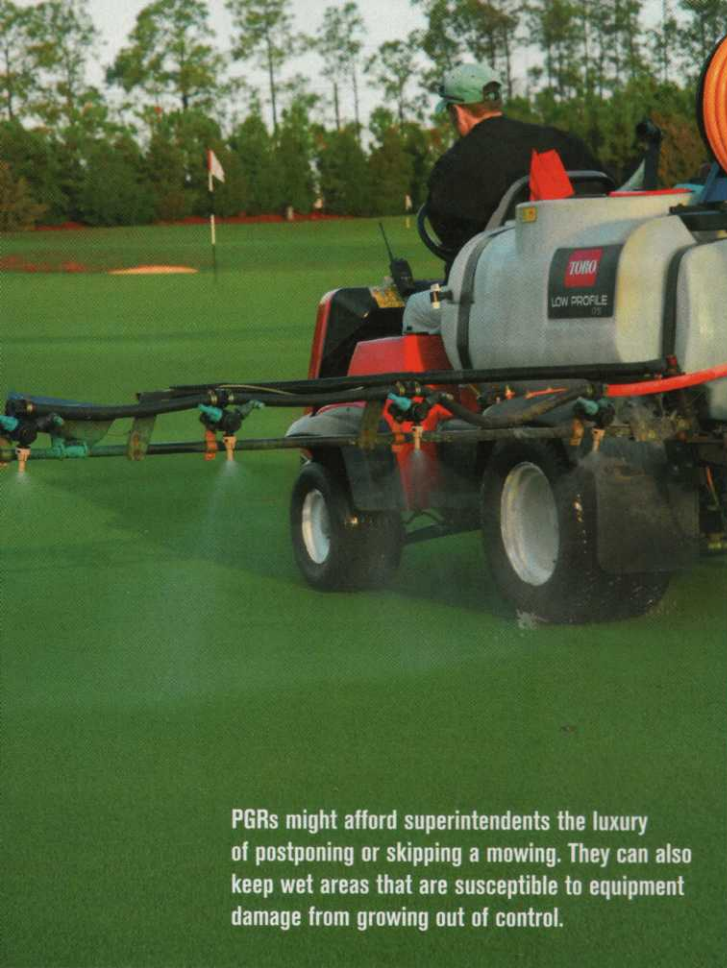
"Many of the courses that have a large budget are really using them on greens, fairways and also roughs," says Roger Storey, vice president of turf and ornamentals for SePRO. "Even courses with limited budgets are looking at the value they bring because of labor savings and improving the quality of turf."

The once-overlooked labor savings that facilities might realize is a key driver in widespread adoption at lower-budget courses, sources say. On greens, PGRs create more consistent conditions by regulating blade growth, thereby allowing mowers to be more efficient and perhaps reduce the need for double-cutting on some days.

Those benefits might not eliminate tasks,

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PGRs might afford superintendents the luxury of postponing or skipping a mowing. They can also keep wet areas that are susceptible to equipment damage from growing out of control.

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but they can shorten the duration needed to perform a slew of turfgrass maintenance operations. As labor-strapped superintendents increasingly are asked to improve conditioning with a modestly increasing budget, every slight time savings can result in directing more labor to high-profile areas of the golf course.

“If superintendents use PGRs, they may only need to mow every other day,” says Ben Cicora, herbicides business manager for Bayer Environmental Science. “They can then focus on other aspects of the course maintenance.”

But it’s difficult to skip mowing altogether on greens and fairways at some facilities, especially at high-end clubs that keep a tight rein on greenspeed and consistency. But that might not apply to roughs. Although it might be difficult to justify an extra expense for out-of-play areas, PGRs might afford superintendents the luxury of postponing or eliminating a scheduled mowing. Used as a preventive before a sustained rain or expected saturation, growth regulators can keep areas manageable in a wet duration when equipment might damage the turfgrass.

“Lower-end courses are realizing some labor benefits with reduced clippings and growth. A lot of times you can skip a mowing in the rough,” says Dave Ravel, golf market manager for Syngenta. “But it’s the repeated applications, as often as

With pesticide regulation and water issues cited as turfgrass managers’ most prominent challenges, PGRs provide a promising environmental message for the community.

10 to 14 days, that really makes a difference.”

Boosting application frequency could generate better results for superintendents already trying PGRs on a limited basis. They can be woven into pest management strategies as well because many PGRs provide some *Poa annua* control and seedhead suppression (visit the Journal of Applied Turfgrass Science [[www.plantmanagementnetwork.org](http://www.plantmanagementnetwork.org)] for studies on PGRs’ efficacy of *Poa* suppression). Of course, overall healthier turf reduces disease risk and insect damage, too. With pesticide regulation and water issues cited as turf managers’ most prominent challenges, manufacturers say there is a promising environmental angle that can be communicated with members and realized in maintenance practices.

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## PGRs Prevail



Synergies with PGRs can be realized with certain tank mixes. Manufacturers are marketing combination products, including type a IIA plus type IIB PGR combination product.

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Less mowing and trimming can save fuel as well as labor resources. And the fewer emissions can be measured and communicated with members and the media. (Visit [www.carbonfootprint.com/companies.html](http://www.carbonfootprint.com/companies.html) to calculate carbon emissions for your golf course. After a baseline has been set, superintendents can gauge how maintenance practices might influence carbon emissions).

“Reducing mowing, trimming, plant water consumption and clipping waste can provide considerable additive benefits,” Storey says.

Their myriad benefits mean that they’re catching on, and business is good for PGR makers, which includes a few new players since trinexapac-

ethyl’s patent expired last year. Several post-patent options now exist, making it likely that more golf courses will try them.

“With the event of post-patent products entering the market, the amount used and the type of golf course [using PGRs] is shifting,” says Russ Mitchell, marketing director for Quali-Pro. “Lower costs per acre will allow lower-budget courses to use PGRs, which make for tighter turf and typically a better root system and less scalping. Moderate and higher-budget courses will be able to expand their uses of PGRs either in total acreage or number of applications per year.”

A few new formulations are expected to hit the market this year as well. SePRO is working on a type IIA and type IIB combination product. Other combination products, including PGRs on fertilizers, are expected to take better root in the industry as well. Wider adoption and more products have manufacturers optimistic about the future of PGRs from a business perspective.

“This is a growing category,” Storey says. “Superintendents are seeing a real value proposition because of the wide range of benefits turf growth regulators provide.” ■

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