

# Off The Fringe

## Business briefs

### August Rounds Rise

Rounds rose 4.4 percent in August, according to Golf Datatech. The strong late-summer surge was fueled by strong gains in the northern United States as plains states dried out from significant flooding earlier this year.

The strongest gains were in Wisconsin, Michigan, Ohio, Indiana and Illinois, which collectively saw a 14.4 percent gain versus last August. The West North Central region — which includes Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska and the Dakotas — also showed strong gains in August of 8.1 percent.

For the year, the total rounds played nationwide are 0.5 percent lower than they were this time last year.

### FarmLinks Qualifies for CEUs

The Golf Course Superintendents Association of America approved The Experience at FarmLinks' programs for continuing education units (CEUs) through the association's distinguished External Education Program.

As of August, golf course superintendents who attend the two-day Experience at FarmLinks will receive 0.45 education points for the Agrium Advanced Technologies' fertilizer technologies presentation and 0.30 points for the On the Course Tour, equaling 0.75 CEU points.

### Dow, PGA Tour Team Up

The PGA TOUR and the Dow Chemical Co. announced a four-year marketing partnership that designates Dow as the "official chemistry company" of the PGA TOUR, Champions Tour, Nationwide Tour and the Tournament Players Clubs (TPCs). Dow will offer its assistance to course management at the TPC and other related courses. ■



## Fertilizer Frustrations a Global Phenomenon

### NEW UREA CENTER COULD HELP REDUCE NITROGEN COSTS

By David Frabotta, Senior Editor

**C**ould a burgeoning middle class in Asia be affecting your fertilizer budget? Industry observers say: without a doubt.

A rising middle class in China and India are creating an unprecedented demand on all types of products. While Americans have already experienced how heightened demand in petroleum products can influence global supply and price, the rising demand for food could create a spike in food prices in a similar way, especially as more prosperous cultures move from a starch-based diet to a more input-intensive protein-based diet, says Mike Stegmann, president of Lange-Stegmann, the parent company to Agrotain International.

Fertilizer prices appear to be a leading indicator of that heightened agriculture demand; fertilizer prices have risen 15 percent since 2005, Stegmann says.

"The greatest challenge to the world will not be \$100 oil (per barrel of light

crude). It will be getting food to the new middle class," Stegmann says, adding that 37 percent of the world's population is either Chinese or Indian.

The demand for more fertilizer, specifically access to reasonably priced urea, was a crucial market condition that prompted Lange-Stegmann to undergo a \$20-million expansion project to its St. Louis Urea Center, a urea storage and handling facility uniquely poised on the northern-most lock-free, ice-free terminal on the Mississippi River.

The expansion project also includes upgrades to Agrotain's Stabilized Nitrogen Center, which produces nitrogen fertilizer with a proprietary falling-curtain process.

The St. Louis Urea Center, which can operate all year with access to every major rail system in the United States in conjunction with river and road transportation, is crucial for the turf-grass and ornamental market because it provides access to affordable urea from international sources, Stegmann says.

Urea made in the United States has



become too expensive for many companies to produce because it is derived from hydrocarbons, mainly natural gas. As petroleum-based prices escalate, manufacturers must look abroad for the economically viable production of raw urea. Most of the urea imported through St. Louis comes from China, Russia and Saudi Arabia, Stegmann says.

“This is an important development because crop farmers can raise prices, but the turf and ornamental markets are incurring higher costs without any real mechanism to raise their prices,” he told the media and distributors at the center’s grand opening in September. “Fertilizer prices probably won’t go back to the way they were, probably ever.”

The world uses about 130 million metric tons of urea for fertilizer each year. The urea center has output capacity of about 1 million metric tons each year. Other fertilizer makers, including Agrium Advanced Technologies, lease warehouse space and handling services from the urea center.

The company also expanded Agrotain’s Stabilized Nitrogen Center, a manufacturing facility that can produce 125,000 tons of its falling-curtain UMAXX and UFLEXX fertilizers each year. Its proprietary process incorporates a urease inhibitor and a nitrification inhibitor to allow a more efficient and longer-lasting absorption process, according to the company. ■

## ‘Elite’ Assistants Attend Green Start Academy

By Larry Aylward, Editor in Chief

“You guys are the elite,” Scott Welge said. “That’s why you were chosen for this.”

Welge, director of marketing of green professional products for Bayer Environmental Science, was speaking to the 54 assistant golf course superintendents in attendance at the third-annual Green Start Academy, a two-day educational and networking event sponsored by Bayer Environmental Science and John Deere Golf. The event took place Oct. 1-3 at Bayer’s technical training center in Clayton, N.C., and John Deere’s Turf Care Manufacturing Facility in Fuquay Varina, N.C.

The 54 assistant superintendents were selected to attend the event by a panel of industry experts after being nominated by their respective superintendents and then submitting essays on why they should be invited. The assistants heard presentations from some of the top superintendents in the business, including

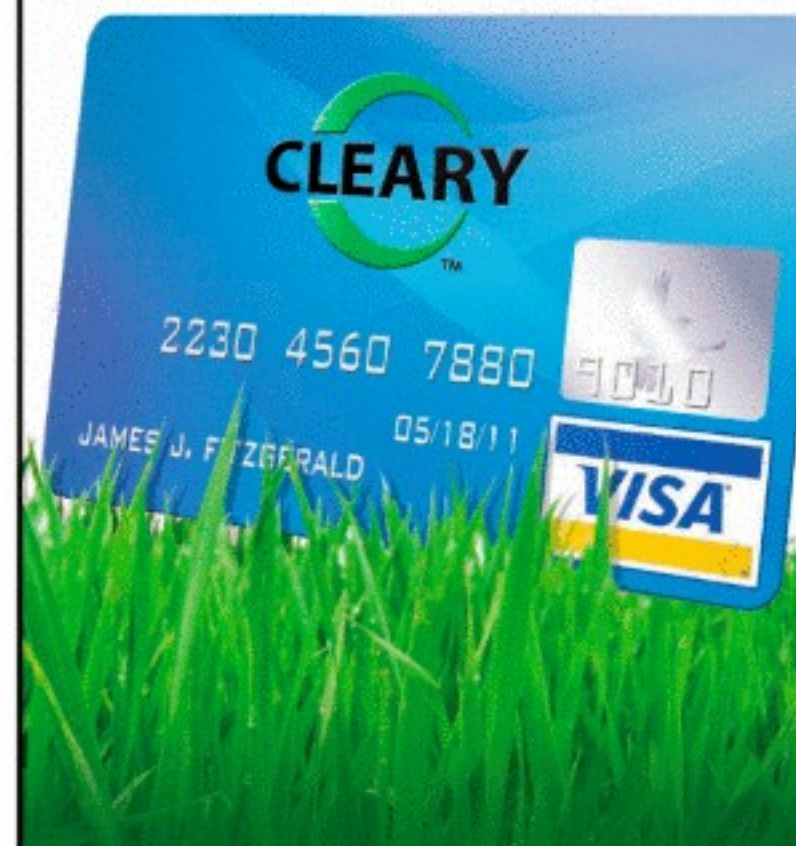
Bob Farren, director of grounds and golf course management at Pinehurst Resort & Country Club, and Bruce Williams, director of golf courses and grounds at the Los Angeles Country Club. They also heard from top technical personnel from Bayer and Deere as well as university professors and other industry professionals.

One of those professors was Dan Bowman from North Carolina State University, who spoke on water management. The roomful of assistants chuckled collectively after hearing Bowman say, “The worst thing to happen to golf turf is color television.”

Bowman, of course, was referring to TV networks that often portray golf courses as places of perfection with their well-manicured emerald-green turf, meticulously edged white-sand bunkers and placid blue-colored ponds. The assistants clearly understood Bowman’s point that they had to strike a balance between being responsible irrigators and providing golfers with fine-looking turf.

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