

# Off The Fringe

## Business briefs

### Syngenta Allies With Deere

Syngenta Professional Products reached a distributor agreement and an agency agreement with John Deere Landscapes for Syngenta's products beginning Oct. 1. The agreements make Syngenta's product available at John Deere Landscapes, which operates more than 630 branches in the United States.

"This agreement allows us to increase the availability of Syngenta products and services in the golf and lawn care markets," Syngenta Lawn and Garden Head Steve Spain said in a prepared statement. "Our philosophy and direction on brand and value aligns nicely with John Deere Landscapes' national presence and brand strategy."

Steve Vincent, John Deere Golf's North American sales manager for agronomic products, said, "We feel this new alliance strengthens our product line and helps provide our customers with more solutions to effectively manage their golf courses."

### FarmLinks Breaks New Ground

The folks at FarmLinks in Sylacauga, Ala., have been busy building new offices and an education pavilion.

For several years, "FarmLinks has envisioned a facility designed to enhance the educational environment for the benefit of guests and partners in The Experience at FarmLinks," according to a company press release. The education pavilion is scheduled for completion this month.

The indoor/outdoor design of the facility is created to work in harmony with the environment and to offer hands-on educational programs. The education pavilion features

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Superintendents and others confer during John Deere Feedback.

## What Do They Think?

### SUPERINTENDENTS DO THE TALKING AT JOHN DEERE FEEDBACK

By Larry Aylward, Editor in Chief

Considering his company's mantra — "Nothing runs like a Deere" — Todd Link is one busy man. That's because Link, the senior engineer of fairway mowers for John Deere Golf, is inventing new machinery that *runs* on less fuel.

With maintenance budgets blown because of high fuel prices, golf course superintendents are seeking more fuel-efficient equipment for mowing. Hence, they're counting on people like Link to design equipment to meet their needs.

This was evident at John Deere Feedback, an event the company held recently at its headquarters in Moline, Ill. The company invited superintendents from around the nation to test its latest equipment innovations on a local golf course and to get their opinions on what they need most these

days in the wonderful world of golf course maintenance.

Of course, "fuel efficiency" were two words muttered often by superintendents at the event. And Link heard them loud and clear.

"Now that fuel prices have gone up, you can't expect them to go down," Link said. "So we're always looking to make a mower more efficient and run at lower RPMs so it burns less fuel."

Link smiled a tad when asked if he feels pressured to deliver the antithesis of a fuel-guzzling fairway mower. Sure there's pressure, he said, but it's fun.

"It's an exciting time to be in the job," Link added.

It's no secret that Deere and other manufacturers are delving into electric and hybrid technology. And while the power density of an electric-drive system is not where it needs to be, it will be in time, Link said.

Shawn Emerson, director of agronomy at Desert Mountain Golf



Club in Scottsdale, Ariz., was on hand at the event to see the latest that John Deere had to offer. Emerson believes there will be some big changes in mowing equipment in five years, including more affordable electric technology. Emerson said the sudden increase in fuel prices is pushing the automotive industry to move faster toward electric technology, which might quicken a trickle-down effect to the specialty equipment industry, including golf course maintenance.

Increased fuel prices, by the way, have forced Emerson to reduce fairway mowings this year. His crew normally uses about 12,000 gallons of fuel a year; the crew will use 10,000 gallons this year.

George Calabro, director of golf maintenance for El Conquistador Country Club in Tucson, Ariz., has also reduced mowing to save fuel. "We're a 45-hole facility, and we average between \$6,500 and \$7,000 a month in fuel costs," he says. "We have to do what we can to save."

Hence, Calabro said more alternative-fuel equipment, such as biodiesel, is needed. "It's the wave of the future."

Being in the desert, improved irrigation technology is also a must for this golf course, Calabro said. "Almost every dollar I spend goes to improving the efficiency of my irrigation system," he added.

Greg Moore, a superintendent and golf construction specialist for On Course Construction in Hamden, Conn., said he wants equipment manufacturers like Deere to eliminate potential small maintenance problems that can snowball into catastrophic costs. That might mean making sure a \$13 bearing on a mower doesn't go bad, which could lead to other more-expensive components getting damaged.

Moore, whose company operates five courses, also said he wants and needs more-versatile equipment.

"If I'm going to spend \$25,000 on [a piece of equipment], I need it to be

versatile," he says. "I can't stand to see equipment just sitting around during the off months."

At John Deere Feedback, there was a mutual sense of respect between the creator of the equipment and its users. While superintendents can go on for hours to talk about what they need in new technology, they appreciate what people like Link are doing to appease their needs.

Link, on the other hand, says he and other John Deere engineers couldn't do what they do without superintendents' feedback.

"We can't figure out what a golf course needs by sitting behind a desk," Link said. "We need to pick superintendents' brains." ■

## Going for the Gusto

### ILLINOIS SUPERINTENDENT TESTS HIS GAME AGAINST SOME OF GOLF'S GREATEST PLAYERS

By David Frabotta, Senior Editor

**I**'m a one-time trunk slammer on the Senior Tour, but I was there," says a proud Tom Robinson, superintendent at Ravinia Green Country Club in Riverwoods, Ill.

Trunk slamming is a touring professional's way of saying he didn't make the cut, but for Robinson, just playing in the U.S. Senior Open was a thrill that won't fade any time soon.

"I'm blessed to have gone through that event," he says. "It was unbelievable to hang out with golf's greats, like (Tom) Watson, (Tom) Kite and (Hale) Irwin. I walked to the range with Fuzzy (Zoeller). It's like every kid's dream."

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