

In These Times, Research Is More Important Than Ever

Bill Gates, surely the most successful college dropout ever, says he sometimes picks up *Time* magazine and reads every article from beginning to end, even the stories that don't interest him. "That way you can be certain to learn something you didn't know previously," says Gates, who left Harvard early to start Microsoft.

Learning is also an essential ingredient of any business, no matter how established or successful. For more than 60 years, LebanonTurf has been an active research participant, continuing to learn about innovative ways to improve our products, manufacturing capabilities and service. Short- and

long-term projects conducted in cooperation with many of the nation's leading academic research institutions, including Arkansas, Auburn, Cornell, Nebraska and Rutgers, help us make the care and management of turfgrass more efficient and cost-effective for golf course superintendents and lawn-care professionals.



By Mike Sisti

As expectations for pristine conditions continue to escalate at the same time that economic forces and regulatory restrictions add new challenges for the turfgrass industry, research has never been more vital. Research also provides the classic win-win-win situation for manufacturers, universities and end-users.

Fertilizer manufacturers turn to the nation's most respected turf programs and researchers to test new ingredients or products, or even to confirm theories on which they may have based decisions for years. What we learn through research helps us go to the market with more confidence and information, and as a result help our customers make better purchasing decisions.

Funding these projects, as well as providing equipment and other resources, help the universities' turf science programs continue to grow in size and stature. One of our longstanding research relationships is with Rutgers University. We recently presented a check for \$280,556 to the

school's Center for Turfgrass Science as royalty payment for its help in turfgrass research. Bruce Clarke, Ph.D., and director of the school's Turfgrass Center, said support from LebanonTurf and other manufacturers has been "critical in helping us develop the best turfgrass varieties to bring to the market." Royalties from its partnership with LebanonTurf and other private sector firms support the center's grassseed breeding program and encourage additional faculty research, Clarke says.

The symbiotic relationship between manufacturers and researchers also provides the assurance that end-users rely on for decision-making and purchasing.

A recent project we undertook to support our Green-Smart technology provides an example of the research process working to all parties' benefits. With the help of our research partners, we ran trials with different fertilizer formulations to see if we could squeeze more efficiency out of the manufacturing process. Based on the outcome of those tests, we were able to develop a better formula that was easier for our manufacturing plant to process. Ultimately, the improved efficiency will help end-users because it adds to our economies of scale, which makes products created with Green-Smart even more price competitive.

When it comes to research, if you never stop learning, you never stop seeing the possibilities. ■

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