

Clark Talks Turf

■ TIMELY TURF ADVICE

TURF SCHOOL
STUDY



→ A Dim Future for University Turfgrass Research

BY CLARK THROSSELL, PH.D.

These are tough times for the golf industry, including university turfgrass research programs. The reason is a lack of funding. It certainly isn't a lack of problems to solve. Funding for turfgrass research is hard to find today and will be harder to find tomorrow. The end result will be less turfgrass research, fewer university turfgrass scientists and less expertise to support superintendents.

Let's start with a review of the funding realities at a public university. States budget money to universities. That money goes to salaries and benefits of professors, administrators and some staff members and basic operations. Professors must secure funding for their research programs, including salaries and benefits for technicians to maintain turf plots or run a lab, salaries, benefits and tuition for graduate students to conduct research, turfgrass plot maintenance, equipment, travel and all the other things that are necessary for a successful research program.

These expenses add up quickly and it is a challenge to secure funding year after year to keep a productive research program running. And in case you are wondering, all professors, not just turfgrass scientists, are required to generate funding to support their research program.

Add to this the dismal financial condition of many states. Additional budget cuts at already stressed public

universities are likely. This will impact all university activities including turfgrass research programs. In short, public funding for turfgrass research is not going to happen.

Another reality of university life for all professors, including turfgrass scientists, is they are expected to secure funding from sources outside the state budget. If funding can't be secured for turfgrass research, turfgrass scientists

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will look to other research areas to apply their knowledge and compete for funding with a net result of a loss of expertise to superintendents.

Funding for turfgrass research is drying up. Traditionally, turf foundations provided generous support to universities for turfgrass research. In many cases, this is not true today. In the last 10 years or so, turf foundations have struggled financially and as a result the amount donated for university turfgrass research has stayed flat or declined.

The USGA has been the driving force funding turfgrass research. Since

the late 1980s, the USGA has provided funding for a wide array of research projects that have yielded numerous advancements that are used daily on golf courses across the country and around the world. Unfortunately, the USGA has had to reduce research funding in the last few years. GCSAA and NTEP also fund turfgrass research and both organizations have had to reduce their research funding over the last few years. Given the tough economic times and stagnation in the golf industry, it is unlikely that increases in research funding will be forthcoming from golf or turf organizations.

University turfgrass research funding is not likely to grow in the future unless the golf course superintendents step up and change the current direction of research funding. Superintendents enjoy a rich legacy of creating and supporting university turf programs. It is time to reinvigorate this legacy.

What can you do? Be seen and be heard. Attend the field day and turf conference sponsored by your state turf program every year and take along a couple of your staff members. Tell the department head and dean how important the turfgrass research program is to your golf course and your career success. Talk to your colleagues in the Carolinas and start your version of Rounds for Research. Personally donate to the turfgrass program in your state. Most of all, talk to your fellow superintendents to raise awareness of the research funding crunch and take action to increase funding for turfgrass research. ■

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