

# Let it Rain

**D**ave Johnson, Rain Bird's director of corporate marketing, took the stage on the Michigan State University campus to launch the Intelligent Use of Water Summit XIII.

With the theme "Play on: Playability in water-sensitive environments," this year's agenda was geared toward the golf course and athletic turf industries. And several superintendents and Michigan State University turf students gathered for the occasion.

"The Intelligent Use of Water is a company philosophy that we came up with about a dozen years ago that really describes the principles the company was founded on — using water wisely and intelligently and efficiently," Johnson said in his opening remarks.

This year's summit assembled some of the country's top researchers to talk about the scientific side of water management, as well as superintendents to discuss the practical side.

## Getting practical

Speaker Shawn Emerson, director of agronomy at Desert Mountain Club, Scottsdale, Ariz., relies heavily on the newest water management technologies at Desert Mountain. In such an arid climate, he has no choice.

But at a time when pressure is mounting in the U.S. to conserve water and irrigate responsibly, Emerson told the audience that conserving water doesn't have to mean brown turf.

"If there's one thing I cannot stand and that I can't get my hands around it's the statement 'Brown is the new green.' Where

Focusing on irrigation in the golf course and sports turf arenas, Rain Bird's Intelligent Use of Water Summit makes a splash with supers and students.

*By Beth Geraci*

A group of superintendents and Michigan State turf students represented the target audience of the Intelligent Use of Water Summit XIII.





did they get that from?" he said. "That's not what I'm about. I'm about green grass. What I want to do is be more efficient at it. What I want to do is be more practical with it. And what I want to do is be educated on it."

"If I'm going to relent and turn back the clock and say, 'Brown is the new green,' then we might as well go back to 1963 when my father was a golf course superintendent," he added.

Ken Mangum, CGCS, director of golf courses and grounds at the Atlanta Athletic Club, explained how irrigation design upgrades at AAC enhanced roughs and fairways, bringing a "wow factor" to the complex that members appreciated.

Kevin Peck hadn't heard of some of the technologies the day's speakers discussed, so the assistant superintendent at Country Club of Detroit was inspired by what he learned. "It's a good perspective on how to manage water, and it's helpful to hear how courses in different regions are using the technology that's available," he said.

And superintendents weren't the only turf managers taking the podium. Mike Boekholder, head groundskeeper for the Philadelphia Phillies and a part-time consultant, told the audience he is amazed by how many times clients complain of problems on their fields yet don't have irrigation.

"The first question out of my mouth is, 'Do you have irrigation?' and they say, 'No, we don't have that. It's expensive to put in.' You have no grass!" he exclaimed.

Boekholder said simply "praying for water" doesn't help anything. What does help is having a well-designed water system and knowing your water window.

"If you're looking to build (a watering system) from ground up, you better think water window on day one," he said. "Because it's great that you have a well-designed irrigation system, but if it takes 10 hours to water everything out there, you may not have

(Above): Attendees are engaged as speakers such as Dr. Ali Harivandi (top right) and Mike Boekholder (lower right) share their expertise. The day's discussions touched on reclaimed water use, utilizing water technology, and irrigating sports turf.

the opportunity to actually do that every night. That water window really should, in my mind, drive the entire design of the system."

## The science side

Summit attendees also got a huge lesson in alternative irrigation techniques from some of the country's top scientists.

Dr. Ali Harivandi, regional specialist in turf soils and water at the University of California, talked about the small amount of quality water readily available for use throughout the world, due to a global population now numbering 7 billion. And you can expect that number to rise to 8.5 billion by 2025, he said.

"Drought has become part of our life," he warned the audience. "For that very reason we have to look into other sources of water if we want to survive as an industry."

That message may abound with doom and gloom, but courses in metro areas are using it as motivation, increasingly turning to recycled water to irrigate their courses. About 12 to 15 percent of golf courses are using reclaimed water, and that number jumps to 37 percent in the Southwest, Harivandi said.

Assistant superintendent Andrew Harrell, Peck's coworker at the Country Club of Detroit, said Harivandi's message made an impact. "I've dealt with reclaimed water before, and it's something that everybody in this industry is going to have to deal with sooner or later," he said. "It's going to be a necessary step that you're going to have to address."

Speaker Carol Colein, executive director of the American Society of Irrigation Consultants (ASIC), said in her position she is "seeing irrigation through a larger lens" than she ever has before. "This water shortage," she stressed, "is something that we have to put our hands around and embrace."

The ASIC will devise a plan to do just that at its 2013 national conference, where water reuse strategies will constitute 25 percent of the program.

Colein also drove home her point that in places like the Great Lakes region, so abundant with water, it's a challenge to convince golf course decision makers to invest in efficient water systems.

Too bad, she said, because "if you've got more uniform water application, if you've got the proper water management tools, you're going to be able to provide more consistent and better playing conditions. Now that rings a bell with golfers." **G**