



BY JAMES E. GUYETTE

More superintendents are less concerned about mowing hard-to-reach turf around ponds and bunkers thanks to the cool technology that has their mowers floating on air. Those using hovering mowers report that the performance level of the machines has improved dramatically the past few years.

The current devices are lighter, tougher and less prone to breakdowns, users say. With the number of hills, dales and bunkers gracing today's courses, a hovering mower in a maintenance facility is a relief for those who cut turf in steep places.

"They're lightweight and maneuverable," reports Jack Holt, a maintenance worker at Pebble Beach Golf Links in Pebble Beach, Calif.

While a hovering mower is not meant for bentgrass greens and other turf requiring high-precision mowing, it does a good job on fairways and rough.

"There's going to be some areas that a riding machine can't mow, and that's where you use them," says Lee McLemore, superintendent at The Country Club of Birmingham in Alabama.

The Country Club staff uses Flymo hovering mowers on deep-banked bunkers and sheer pond shorelines. A hovering mower is more efficient than a typical single-shafted weed trimmer to tackle this type of tough terrain, McLemore says. "It's like having a string trimmer that floats, except you get a better cut," he adds.

The string trimmer-like cutting technology of a Flymo makes it safer than a bladed mower, McLemore says. (The Flymo and Husqvarna brands utilize a triangular-shaped, monofilament line.) Workers should wear standard eye protection, although the mower doesn't scatter much debris, he notes. But he advises users to wear shoes with ankle support

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Hangin' In There

Today's hovering mowers are lighter,
tougher, and more popular than ever

BOB LYNCH

Hover Mowers

Continued from page 51

because they're working on slopes.

McLemore oversees two courses, and his department purchases six to eight hovering mowers each year. "We get a year (of performance) out of a mower at the most," he says. "It's not a high-capital item."

At the Golf Course of Lawsonia in Green Lake, Wis., superintendent Mike Berwick says his crew uses Eastman Industry's Hover Mower on "anything we can't get a riding mower on and anything we can't put a four-cycle engine on because of the angle."

The Hover Mower's adjustable-height cutting feature was attractive to Berwick, who recalls tales told by colleagues of the challenges of mowing slopes.

"I've heard all kinds of crazy stories," he says, such as those involving four-wheel drive vehicles towing attached mowers and workers who tied ropes on mower handles to get a longer reach. "We have elevated greens, including one that's 25 feet high," Berwick says, adding that the greens can be easily reached and cut with a Hover Mower.

The Husqvarna Hovering Trimmer used at Oak Hill GC in Milford, N.J., does a better job on bunker banks than a weed trimmer, says superintendent Jim Martin. "We use it mainly on steep bunker faces," he says.

Martin admits, however, that some of his workers prefer weed trimmers because they're less cumbersome.

Name game

The Flymo, Hover Mower and Hovering Trimmer are different makes of hovering mowers, but sometimes even their own users have a difficult time telling the brands apart. Call it the Band-Aid syndrome.

Andy Masciarella, president of Precision Small Engine Co., U.S. manufacturer of the Flymo, says his hovering mower brand suffers from the syndrome. People call Precision with diagnostic questions or requests for Flymo parts, but sometimes they actually own competing brands or a make that's no longer manufactured.

There are other reasons for brand confusion, including:

- Precision is the exclusive manufacturer and distributor of Flymo mowers in the United States, but the Husqvarna Hovering Trimmer

is made by Flymo in England as a private-label product.

- Flymo and Husqvarna hovering mowers have the same design. Did we mention that Precision is also a Husqvarna distributor? "It gets kind of complicated," Masciarella admits.

- Eastman Industries of Portland, Maine, makes the Eastman Hover Mower. In 1997,

IF YOU'RE PONDERING A HOVERING MOWER PURCHASE, MAKE SURE THE MANUFACTURER IS GOING TO BE AROUND LONG ENOUGH TO ENSURE THAT SERVICE AND REPLACEMENTS ARE AVAILABLE.

Eastman purchased Grasscraft, which also made a hovering mower. Eastman stopped manufacturing Grasscraft hovering mowers in 1998 and sold out its inventory by 1999. But the company still stocks parts for it.

- Another company in Florida, which didn't return a phone call, also makes a hovering mower with "hover mower" in its name.

In demand

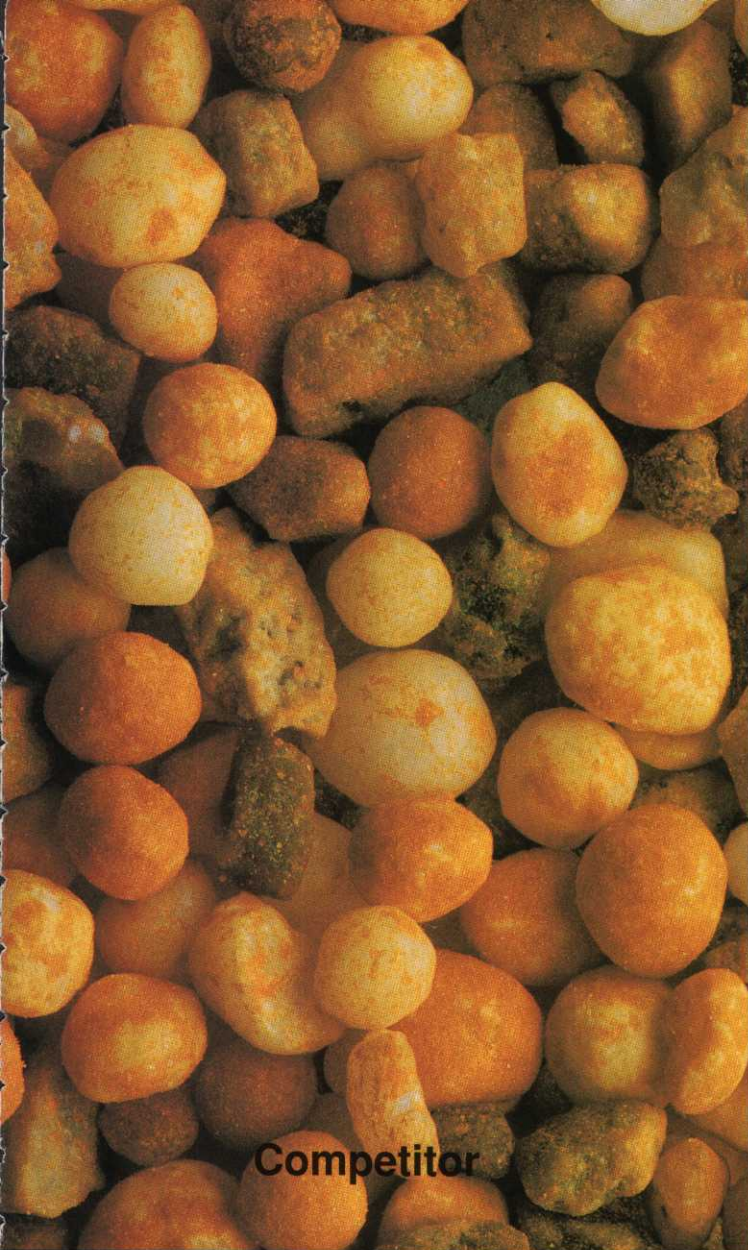
Manufacturers of hovering mowers say their use is widespread among golf courses. Chuck Hanners, Eastman's national sales manager, guesses that up to 95 percent of U.S. courses carry hovering mowers, and there are about 40,000 in use.

Masciarella is more conservative, saying that 75 percent of golf course maintenance staffs have a hover mower. "Ninety-nine percent of what we sell is to the golf course industry," he adds.

It's not uncommon for a golf course to have 25 to 30 machines, according to Masciarella, who claims most courses have five or six hovering mowers.

But superintendents pondering a hovering mower purchase should make sure the manufacturer is going to be around long enough to ensure that service and replacement parts are available. "There have been companies selling hovering mowers that have come and gone," Masciarella says. ■

James E. Guyette is a free-lance writer from Cleveland.



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The art of agronomy is fascinating, and the science of agronomy is remarkable. But it's the combination of art and science that illustrates what's best about growing grass.

Think about it — the agronomic decisions that superintendents make every day include tactile input from the course as well as knowledge of the discipline. But science has started to rule the day, and that scares me.

The growing notion that we must find scientific proof for everything we do is disturbing. Just as upsetting is the thinking that if we can't find published research on something, we shouldn't be doing it.

While today's turfgrass researchers have my utmost respect, superintendents shouldn't forget that their individual cases may vary from a university test plot. That certainly doesn't mean we should throw out all research just because it doesn't meet our specific needs, but it does mean we shouldn't be slaves to it.

There's a scene in *Dead Poet's Society* where a group of students read a poetry passage in a textbook that then asks them to graph the poem to determine its quality. The teacher, played by Robin Williams, instructs his students to tear out that section of their books. The point is clear: Poetry doesn't succumb to statistical analysis.

Neither does tending to a golf course. What is great about a course's condition to some often matters little to others. Moreover, members and golfers simply know they like or dislike something without knowing exactly why. If we ask them, we are likely to hear confusion rather than clarity as they try to articulate their answers.

Technical issues are now an integral piece of the superintendent's education. Technology has revolutionized the business, but it can't be to the detriment of tried-and-true methods that have benefited the game.

There are those who now say: "Where's the research to prove that? It doesn't matter if that method or technique has produced amazing results because we must be able to look up the research to prove validity." Dis-

Stay in Touch With Your Feelings

BY DAVE WILBER



THE GROWING
NOTION THAT
WE MUST FIND
SCIENTIFIC PROOF
FOR EVERYTHING
WE DO IS
DISTURBING

counting proven results turns the art of greenkeeping into nothing more than a science.

Our artistry is evident in the way we talk about the game. We evaluate golf courses based on subjective criteria such as looks and playability rather than yield, which is how other forms of agriculture are evaluated. But we're still tied to agriculture inextricably, so we run the risk of losing our instinct for the feel of a course because agricultural research doesn't support feelings.

That's not to say we should ignore science. The best superintendents I've seen are the ones who keep up with science and stay aware of modern development. But they also don't discount their own sense of what their courses need and what has worked for them.

In fact, what's common among top superintendent is the continuous — and sometimes informal — research they do on their own. Most have test plots for experiments and use personal indicators to identify what's happening. They may not be double-blind, replicated independent studies, but these kinds of on-site evaluations have limitless possibilities.

For nearly the entire history of greenkeeping, those responsible for preparation of the surface for golf have had their hands directly upon the canvas of the golf course — and that will never change.

Seeking solutions means embracing science, finding answers and having the wisdom to know that results do not always come with an explanation.

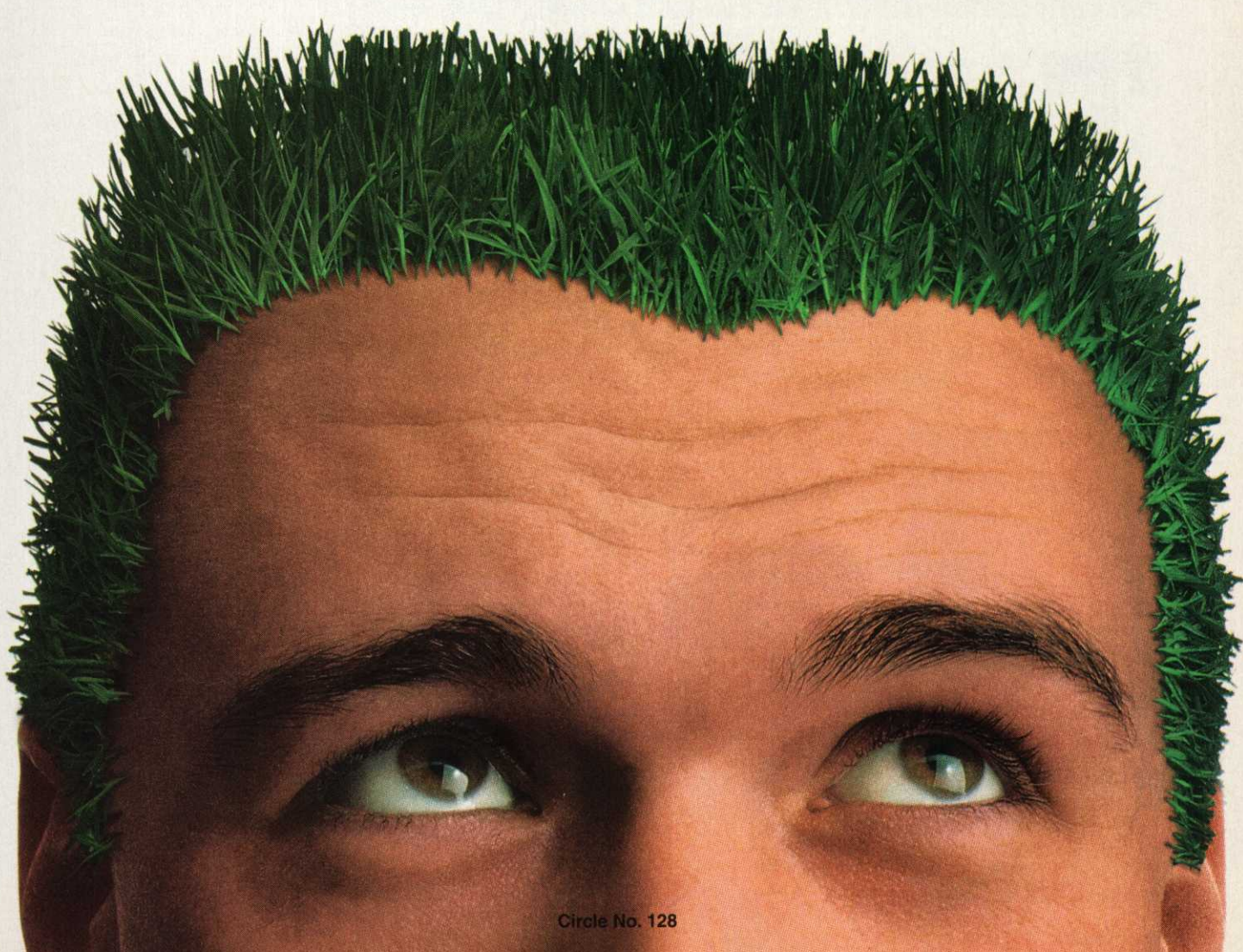
Dave Wilber is an independent agronomic advisor who does not use tarot cards or palm reading as one of his evaluation techniques. He can be reached at dave@soil.com or 916-630-7600.

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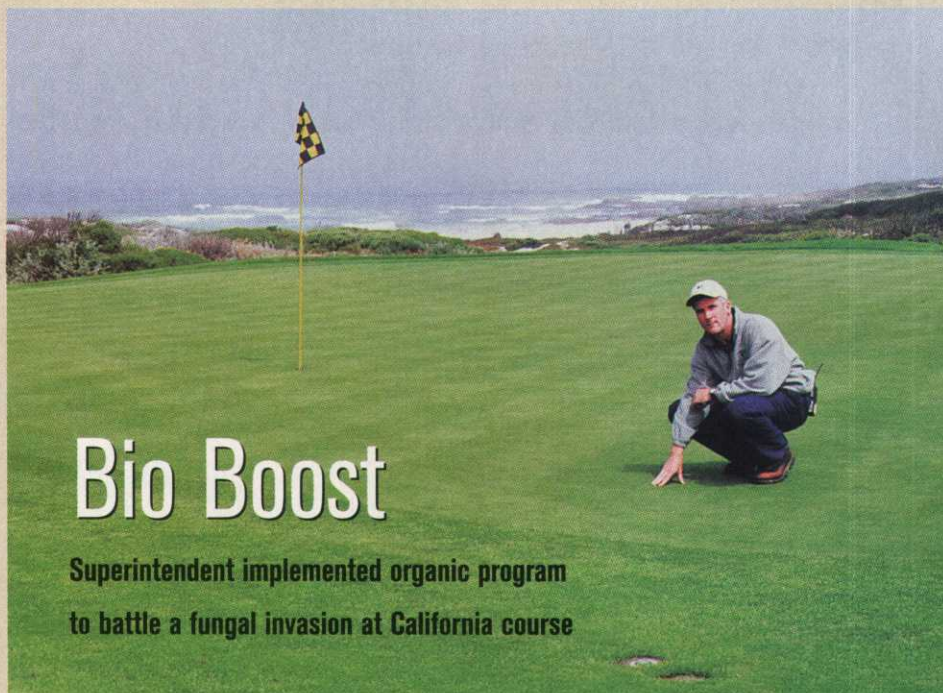
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THE LINKS AT SPANISH BAY, PEBBLE BEACH, CALIF.



Bio Boost

Superintendent implemented organic program to battle a fungal invasion at California course

The Links at Spanish Bay, in Pebble Beach, Calif., provides some of the most beautiful golf holes in the world. Unfortunately, the course's location also leaves it vulnerable to diseases like fusarium, anthracnose, pythium and yellow patch.

Problem

The Links at Spanish Bay — a high-profile course in an environmentally sensitive area — needed to control fungal turfgrass diseases like fusarium nivale and anthracnose safely and effectively.

Solution

Use a biological fungicide and organic fertilizers as part of a "best practices" fertility program.

The problem

Climatic conditions, including moderately cool temperatures combined with coastal moisture and heavy fog in the summer, contribute to the high incidence of disease. The salt air coming off the Pacific Ocean also causes problems.

The maintenance staff at the high-profile course needed a way to control fungal turfgrass diseases safely and effectively because the course is in an environmentally sensitive area. California's strict environmental laws force the Links at Spanish Bay to adhere to mitigation plans established with government agencies. So to work within California statutes, the course needed to find a biological fungicide to complement its chemical applications.

The solution

As they prepared for the

Tom Huesgen has reduced chemical usage on the Links at Spanish Bay, thanks to his best practices program.

1998 season (the club is open year round, but the course's heaviest use is between April and October), then-superintendent Forrester Arthur and assistant superintendent Tom Huesgen (who became superintendent in November 1998 when Arthur went to the Preserve GC) began searching for a biological fungicide to add to their disease-management strategy.

The two were using the following chemical fungicides on a rotational basis: Heritage, Banner Maxx, Rubigan, Daconil 2787, Bayleton 50, Subdue and Fore.

Arthur and Huesgen heard about a liquid biological fungicide called Com-

panion from another area superintendent. It contains *Bacillus subtilis* GB03 microbes, which attach to the turf's root hairs, multiply and crowd out disease-causing pathogens. The microbes also produce enzymes, plant growth regulators and antibiotics that weaken the cell walls of pathogens.

Companion, which was granted an experimental use permit by the EPA and is expected to have full registration in 2001, also contains a food source for the *Bacillus*. After researching the product and speaking with representatives from Growth Products (the company that produces Companion), Arthur and Huesgen tested the product on the course's greens.

The results

When Arthur and Huesgen applied Companion to the course, chemical fungicide applications dropped significantly within three months because the biological worked so well. There were also longer intervals between disease symptoms and breakouts, giving the superintendent more time to treat the disease before a full-scale invasion claimed the turf.

"At times, Companion alone checked *Fusarium nivale* (*Gerlachia nivalis*)," Arthur says. "We never sprayed chemical fungicides on a preventative basis because Companion worked so well. This eliminated excess fungicide use and allowed

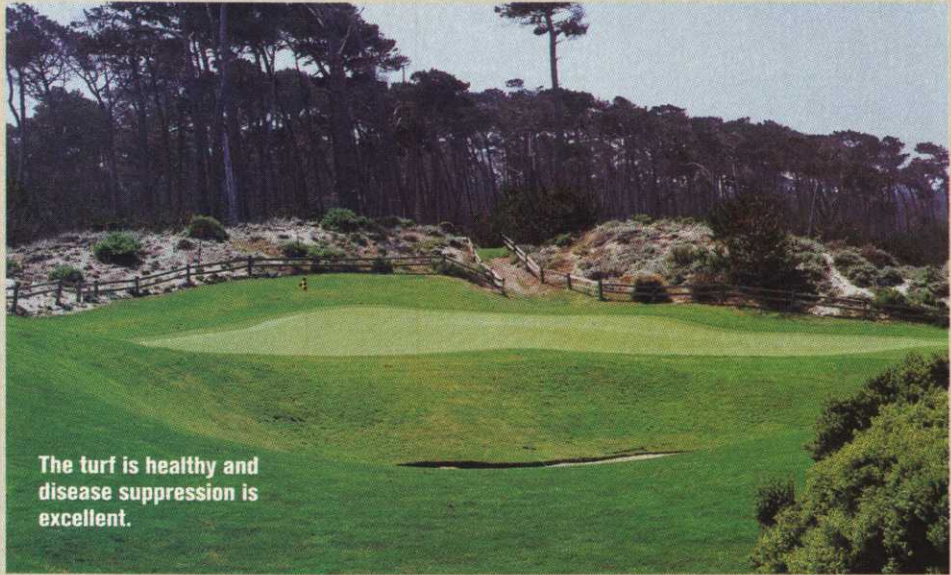
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me to become a better integrated pest management program manager.”

In fact, the Links at Spanish Bay reduced its chemical fungicide use by more than 50 percent for the 1998 season. In 1999, chemical fungicide use on the course declined again by nearly 30 percent from May to October.

“I now use far fewer applications of my chemical fungicide rotation compared to the norm for the region,” Huesgen says. “We have received positive results, great disease suppression and extremely healthy turf.

“We also have root mass and a length of 2 to 3



inches on our Poa annua greens,” he notes. “A good biological, in conjunction with a good fertility program, is an effective tool in

resistance management. This is a combination that allows for less frequent chemical fungicide usage and an increase in microbe

populations, so we are reducing the chance of disease resistance while still taking care of the environment.” ■

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 07 60 Golf Course Architect
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 09 90 Golf Course Builder
 10 105 University/College
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- 12 10 Golf Course Superintendent
 13 15 Assistant Superintendent
 14 20 Owner or Management Company Executive
 15 30 General Manager
 16 35 Director of Golf
 17 70 Green Chairman
 18 45 Club President
 19 75 Builder/Developer
 20 55 Architect/Engineer
 21 60 Research Professional
 22 65 Other Titled Personnel (please specify) _____

3. What is your facility's annual maintenance budget?

- 23 A More than \$2 Million
 24 B \$1,000,001-\$2 Million
 25 C \$750,001-\$1 Million
 26 D \$500,001-\$750,000
 27 E \$300,001-\$500,000
 28 F \$150,001-\$300,000
 29 G Less than \$150,000

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- 30 A 9
 31 B 18
 32 C 27
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103	115	127	139	151	163	175	187	199	211	223	235	247	259	271	283	295	307
104	116	128	140	152	164	176	188	200	212	224	236	248	260	272	284	296	308
105	117	129	141	153	165	177	189	201	213	225	237	249	261	273	285	297	309
106	118	130	142	154	166	178	190	202	214	226	238	250	262	274	286	298	310
107	119	131	143	155	167	179	191	203	215	227	239	251	263	275	287	299	311
108	120	132	144	156	168	180	192	204	216	228	240	252	264	276	288	300	312
109	121	133	145	157	169	181	193	205	217	229	241	253	265	277	289	301	313
110	122	134	146	158	170	182	194	206	218	230	242	254	266	278	290	302	314
111	123	135	147	159	171	183	195	207	219	231	243	255	267	279	291	303	315
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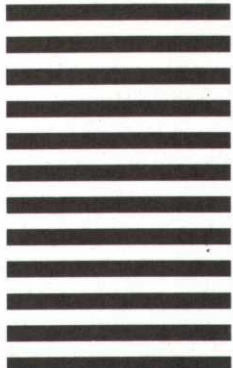
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 - 11 100 Others Allied to the Field (please specify) _____

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107	119	131	143	155	167	179	191	203	215	227	239	251	263	275	287	299	311
108	120	132	144	156	168	180	192	204	216	228	240	252	264	276	288	300	312
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