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Fungicide Frustration

Continued from page 50

all reports of resistance are accurate. Mike Boehm, assistant professor of plant pathology at The Ohio State University, says superintendents shouldn't forget that they're not applying fungicides in a vacuum. Environmental factors, such as precipitation level and soil temperature, also affect fungicides' effectiveness.

"When people tell me that they're getting resistance to their fungicide programs, I have a list of 20 questions I immediately ask them," Boehm says. "Sometimes, the issue isn't resistance. It can be as easy as changing fertility schedules."

Superintendents should keep their composure, even if they don't see immediate effects of their usual fungicide, says John Watkins, a professor of plant pathology at the University of Nebraska. Hitting the disease with another broad-spectrum blast soon after the first could intensify the problem, he says. "Try not to hit the panic button too early," Watkins says.

Wakar Uddin, assistant professor of plant pathology at Penn State University, agrees.

"There are definitely some resistance issues," Uddin says. "Fortunately, because superintendents are well informed and have significant experience with fungicides, the problem isn't as widespread as it could be. That's encouraging."

"The only way we will know about the fungicide sensitivity is through research experiments," Uddin adds. "I would like to find out about any problems now rather than later, especially with gray leaf spot."

Uddin, along with Syngenta's Gilberto Olaya, launched an in-depth study of fungicide resistance in gray leaf spot in February. Uddin says that while the turfgrass industry can't overlook resistance issues, there hasn't been a scientifically documented case.

"That leads some of us to ask, 'Is what some superintendents are experiencing really resistance or is it something else?'" Uddin says. "That's the mystery we're currently trying to unravel in the Northeast." ■

IS THE PRICE RIGHT?

By Pat Jones, Publisher/Editorial Director

Fungicides, perhaps more than other chemicals in the market, have created budget challenges for superintendents. Unless you have a crystal ball to predict weather patterns, you rarely know how much you'll need during a season.

Pricing is, however, another matter. Historically, the final price a course paid for a fungicide purchase was based on a mix of quantity, relationship with the distributor and, of course, haggling. However, the emergence of so-called "agency" pricing has changed that dynamic — and brought mixed reviews from superintendents.

Agency pricing is a transaction where a distributor never actually purchases a product from a manufacturer. Instead, a distributor acts as an "agent" for the maker and sells the product on its behalf at a predetermined price. In return, the agent receives a commission based on a scale set in advance by the agreement. No muss, no fuss — and no haggling.

Manufacturers like it because it simplifies the supply chain and makes the market — and margins — more predictable. Distributors like it because there's less of the risk associated with buying and inventory of product that they must store and resell.

Some superintendents like the concept. "I don't mind it [because] that's one less thing I have to 'shop' for," says Parin Schmidt of Glenwoodie GC in Glenwood, Ill.

The lack of competitive pricing led Walter Montross of Westwood CC in Vienna, Va., to embrace agency pricing. "Over the last couple of years, buying from the lowest bidder didn't amount to much difference," he says. "What I really want to do is support the [local] companies that have taken care of me."

Superintendent Ed Walsh, now building a new course in Pennsylvania, also makes his decision based on local support rather than price. "Agency pricing helps keep the small vendor in business," he says.

For others, the notion of fixed pricing doesn't sit well. "It takes away the incentive to be better than the other (dealers)," says Jay Buck of Meadowlands CC in Bluebell, Pa.

To others, it just seems wrong. "Agency pricing is price fixing, and I don't like it," says Terry Bonar, CGCS of Cleveland's Canterbury GC.

Herb Watson of Hartford (Conn.) GC

shares that view. "I can't understand how the manufacturers can get away with this kind of price fixing," he says. "However, I do understand how it can help the little distributor stay alive."

Among manufacturers and distributors, a new debate over agency pricing has emerged with the growth in sales of "post-patent" chemicals. One specific example involves generic chlorothalonil-based products that are marketed as an alternative to Daconil. Since the patent protection for Daconil expired a decade ago, Griffin LLC and Sipcam Agro USA have launched generic versions of Daconil that they say provide similar control but at lower prices or with different product benefits.

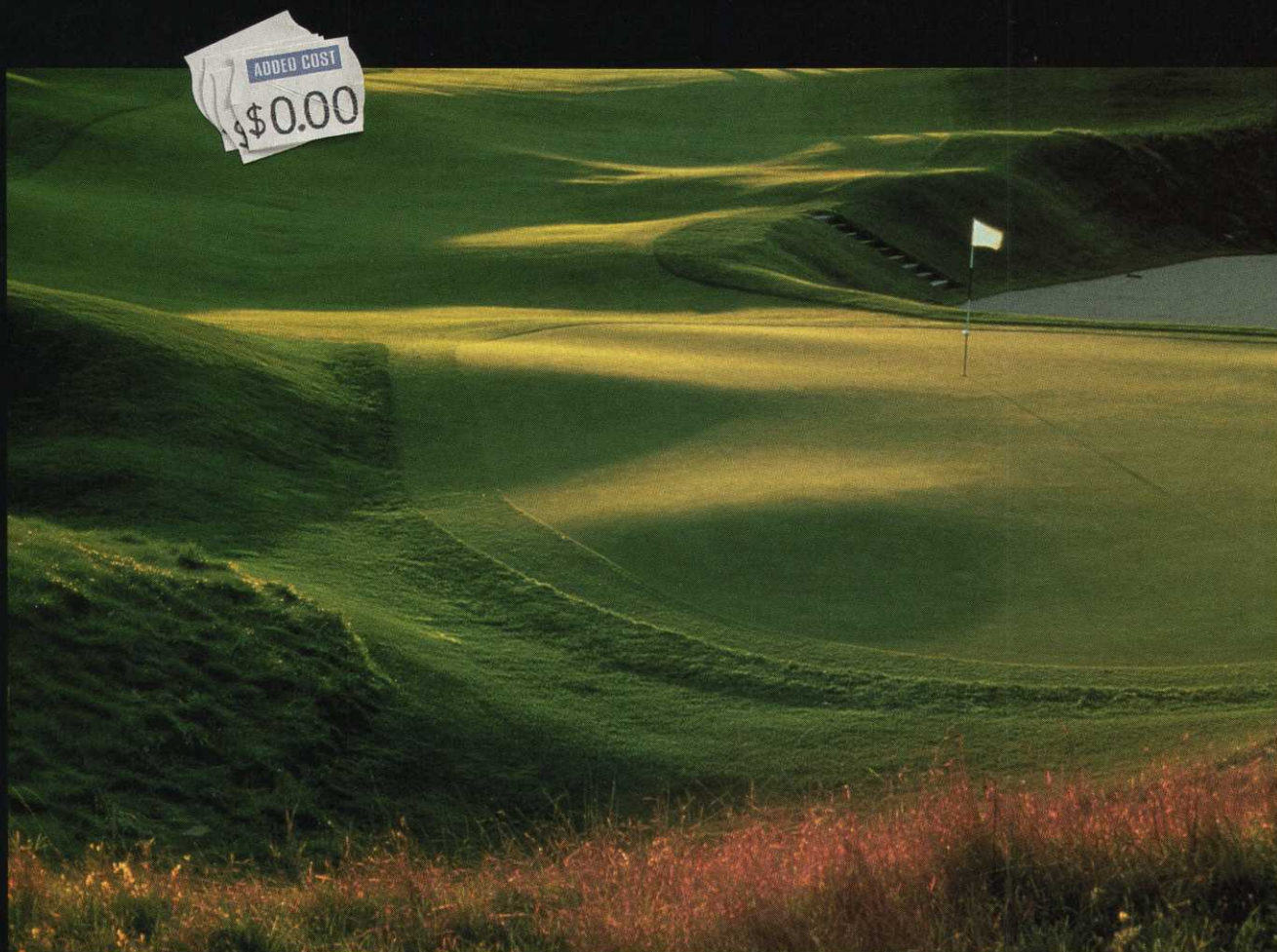
The problem, according to both companies, is that Syngenta uses its agency pricing agreement with distributors to create an incentive to sell the Daconil brand. According to Griffin's general manager, Owen Towne, the agreement reduces the standard agency commission on sales of Heritage, Primo and other Syngenta professional products if the distributor chooses to sell a chlorothalonil alternative like his company's Concorde brand or Sipcam's Echo.

"We're certainly not against agency, but we think this limits a choice for superintendents," Towne says. "We'd like to see a level playing field where distributors weren't forced to choose."

Bob Yarborough, Sipcam's business manager for T&O products, says: "I've lost key distributors because they didn't want to be 'dis-incentivized' under agreements like this. The loss to superintendents is the loss of choice and with the loss of choice comes higher prices."

Keelan Pulliam, who heads Syngenta's professional products group, says the company's agency program "in no way" restricts a customer's choices. Instead, it simply creates incentives for distributors to carry the company's full product line.

"We have the most extensive product line in the industry, and we want to encourage distributors to sell all of our brands as well as Daconil over other brands," Pulliam says. "These kinds of incentives ultimately don't restrict a superintendent's choices or access to alternative products. On the contrary, superintendents have more choices, particularly in terms of fungicides, than ever before." ■



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Learning Curve

Manufacturers say superintendents need to be better educated about slow-release fertilizer



You thought (and still do) that programming your VCR was puzzling. That is, until you tried to understand how slow-release fertilizer works.

Show Jeff Higgins a superintendent who can explain the functions of slow-release fertilizer clearly, and Higgins will show you someone who can solve a Rubik's Cube in a minute. Higgins, director of market development for Pursell Technologies in Sylacauga, Ala., says perplexity reigns in the world of slow-release fertilizer.

"Superintendents are confused," he says. "There are also a lot of so-called experts, including Ph.D.s, who misunderstand slow-release fertilizer."

Higgins, a Ph.D. himself, was a turf specialist at Auburn University before coming to Pursell. He says most universities aren't teaching future superintendents about the basic functions of slow-release fertilizer.

Others agree that education needs to be addressed. One company executive, who asked to be unnamed, questioned whether some manufacturers' own salespeople can present adequate sales pitches about their products and how they compare to the competition's goods. It's not that the slow-release technology is new. "What we have now isn't a lot different than what we had back in the '50s," says Higgins, whose company offers superintendents educational courses on fertilizer technology.

But the technology has only come of age in the past 15 years, especially in the golf course maintenance industry, stresses Bill Stringfellow, director of product development and management for Rocky River, Ohio-based Lesco.

Higgins and Stringfellow note that there are only a handful of slow-release technologies. Higgins says slow-release nitrogen sources fall into two groups distinguished by their manufacturing processes — urea-reaction fertilizers and coated fertilizers.

The problem for superintendents — and the source of their confusion — is the profusion of products created from the technologies. "Some of the slow-release products are just adaptations of other products," Stringfellow says.

The way the "new" products are presented doesn't help matters. "Everybody has to add their own marketing flair to say their stuff is better than your stuff," Higgins says.

Gary Neyman, product manager of the golf course division for Lebanon Turf Products in Butler, Pa., says consolidation

of companies that manufacture slow-release fertilizer will decrease the number of products. "In many cases, good business practices will dictate what stays and what doesn't," he says.

Despite their confusion, superintendents are keenly interested in nitrogen issues. They know proper management of nitrogen plays an important role in their careers. "Nitrogen has become increasingly important in agronomic performance and what superintendents are trying to achieve with playability," says Alan Nees, vice president of turf and ornamental sales for Mequon, Wis.-based Agrotain International.

Superintendents are asking several questions about slow-release fertilizer, including:

- When should I apply it to get the best performance?
- How much do I need to water it, and should I water it in?
- How does the fertilizer break down and how long does it take?
- What kind of fertilizer should I use in my region?

Superintendents are also asking about cost. Don Johnson, manager of professional products from Simplot Turf and Horticulture, says they're more concerned about economics, not just agronomic performance.

"They're looking at the whole package," Johnson says. "They're asking themselves if they're getting the product performance they want over a certain time."

But when it comes to price, superintendents shouldn't only consider the cost per bag or ton of fertilizer, manufacturers say. The real economics of the product have to do with use efficiencies, Higgins stresses. "What's significant is cost per day of nitrogen," Stringfellow adds.

While Higgins says no new slow-release fertilizer technology currently exists, manufacturers continue to improve and tweak current products for better performance. Bill Davis, sales manager for Tyler Enterprises of Elwood in Libertyville, Ill., says manufacturers continue to address regionality issues. "It's difficult to make one fertilizer for the entire United States," he adds.

As with products in other industries, there are keys for success. Thomas Handel, vice president and general manager of the professional turf products division for The Andersons Technologies in Maumee, Ohio, says the company discovered superintendents value excellent customer service. In market research, The Andersons learned that superintendents want performance, value, availability, ease of use and service.

Of course, no one can forget education. "We all have to be constantly looking to evolve," Nees says. ■



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Going to the Mat With Mother Nature

Turf reinforcement mats save course from being damaged by wind and wave

**BY FRANK H. ANDORKA JR.,
ASSOCIATE EDITOR**

Wind and water have shaped the

TPC of the Twin Cities in Blaine, Minn., from the beginning. Winds in the area routinely reach 20 mph to 30 mph. They howl across the 61 acres of lakes on the property and create waves rivaling those on nearby Lake Superior. But the combination of wind and water cause erosion on the golf course.

The problem

When the owners hired superintendent Pat Franklin to supervise the course's grow-in in 1999, he understood he had to battle Mother Nature. But until he visited the

Problem

Strong winds and wavy water threatened to destroy some of the course's most striking features.

Solution

Turf reinforcement mats held the soil in place long enough for the turf to thrive and protect it from erosion along lake banks.



course and saw the destruction she could do firsthand, he didn't realize the scope of the problems he would face. The wind made the grow-in difficult because it wreaked havoc with the sandy soils.

"We would shape features for the course and two hours later they would be gone," Franklin says. "You'd find sand drifts across cart paths that reminded you of snow drifts. There was rarely a calm day."

When the construction company dug the lakes, workers dumped the sandy soil on land designated for the course. Nearly 5 million cubic yards of material were moved on to the course — but it didn't stay in place long, Franklin says. He knew the turf would prevent soil erosion if he could give it time to grow, but the winds made that almost impossible.

"I remember walking the course and seeing irrigation pipes exposed on my first

visit," Franklin says. "The pipes had been buried three feet under the surface. That's when I got my first inkling that I wasn't working under ordinary conditions. It wasn't unusual to wear goggles while touring the course because the sand was blowing."

In addition, several holes abutted lakes. He knew the water would eat away at holes on the course where the lakes provided a spectacular backdrop for play. He needed a permanent solution to protect the soil from the water, too.

"Grass is strong, but it's not strong enough to survive a constant buffeting by the waves," Franklin says. "It was going to need help."

The solution

Turf reinforcement mats provided Franklin, now the superintendent at the TPC at Deere Run in East Moline, Ill., with the solution he was seeking. The mats come

The course used 44 acres of temporary mats to battle wind erosion during construction.

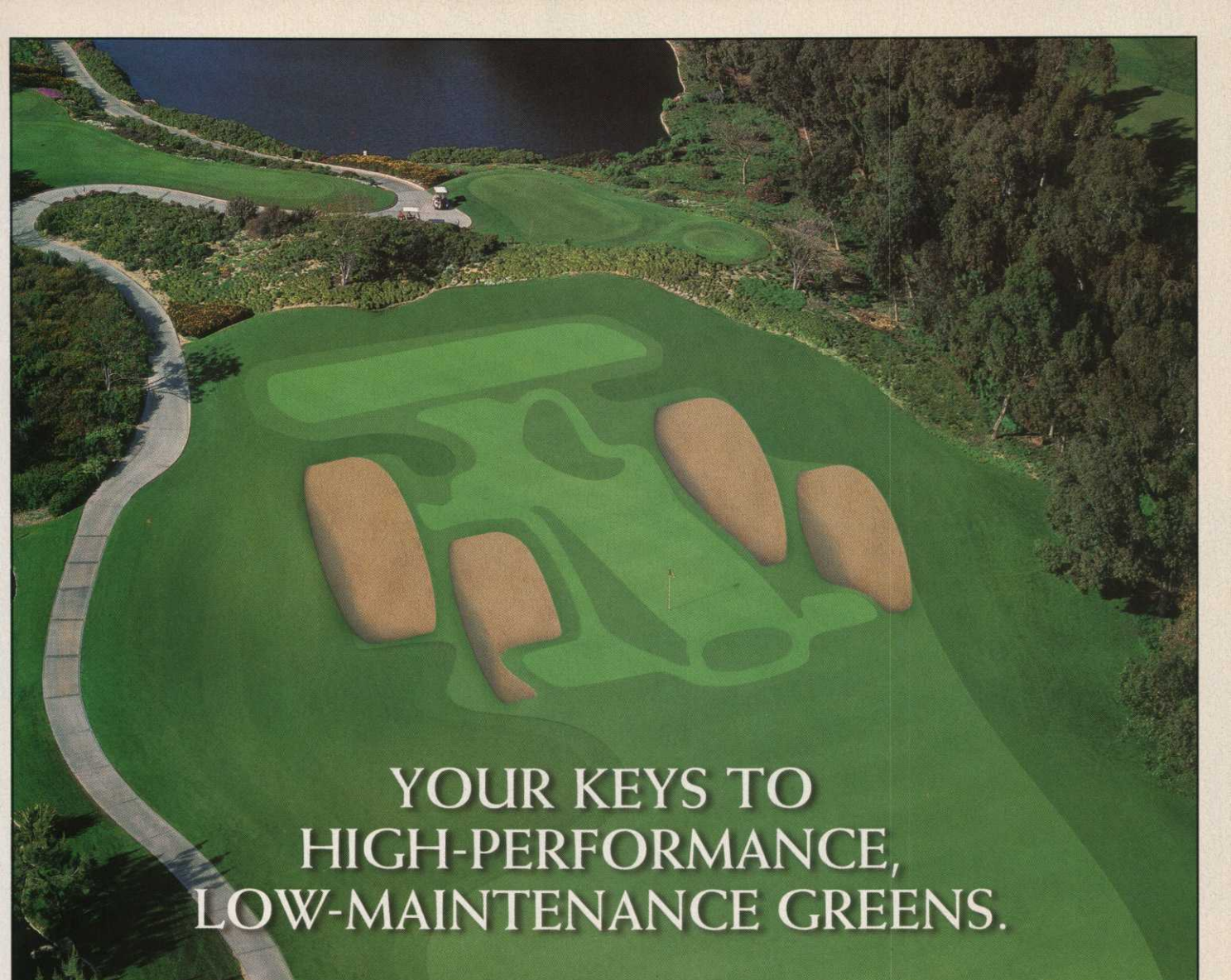
in two varieties: temporary and permanent.

Temporary mats keep the soil in place until the turfgrass' root structures take over the job. Then they erode away when they no longer serve their purpose, leaving strong stands of turfgrass behind. Permanent mats are designed for areas that will continue to be buffeted by wind and water. They slow erosion so the subsoil doesn't wash away and take the golf hole with it.

Franklin decided American Excelsior Co.'s Curlex mats would solve the problem of wind erosion during grow-in. After reconstructing tees and other features three or four times, Franklin says he installed the temporary turf reinforcement mats.

"The only other answer was to water the course to

Continued on page 61



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- 07 60 Golf Course Architect
- 08 70 Golf Course Developer
- 09 90 Golf Course Builder
- 10 105 University/College
- 11 100 Others Allied to the Field (please specify) _____

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- 13 15 Assistant Superintendent
- 14 25 Owner/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) _____

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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
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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
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