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Off The Fringe

Business briefs

August Rounds Rise

Rounds rose 4.4 percent in August, according to Golf Datatech. The strong late-summer surge was fueled by strong gains in the northern United States as plains states dried out from significant flooding earlier this year.

The strongest gains were in Wisconsin, Michigan, Ohio, Indiana and Illinois, which collectively saw a 14.4 percent gain versus last August. The West North Central region — which includes Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska and the Dakotas — also showed strong gains in August of 8.1 percent.

For the year, the total rounds played nationwide are 0.5 percent lower than they were this time last year.

FarmLinks Qualifies for CEUs

The Golf Course Superintendents Association of America approved The Experience at FarmLinks' programs for continuing education units (CEUs) through the association's distinguished External Education Program.

As of August, golf course superintendents who attend the two-day Experience at FarmLinks will receive 0.45 education points for the Agrium Advanced Technologies' fertilizer technologies presentation and 0.30 points for the On the Course Tour, equaling 0.75 CEU points.

Dow, PGA Tour Team Up

The PGA TOUR and the Dow Chemical Co. announced a four-year marketing partnership that designates Dow as the "official chemistry company" of the PGA TOUR, Champions Tour, Nationwide Tour and the Tournament Players Clubs (TPCs). Dow will offer its assistance to course management at the TPC and other related courses. ■



Fertilizer Frustrations a Global Phenomenon

NEW UREA CENTER COULD HELP REDUCE NITROGEN COSTS

By David Frabotta, Senior Editor

Could a burgeoning middle class in Asia be affecting your fertilizer budget? Industry observers say: without a doubt.

A rising middle class in China and India are creating an unprecedented demand on all types of products. While Americans have already experienced how heightened demand in petroleum products can influence global supply and price, the rising demand for food could create a spike in food prices in a similar way, especially as more prosperous cultures move from a starch-based diet to a more input-intensive protein-based diet, says Mike Stegmann, president of Lange-Stegmann, the parent company to Agrotain International.

Fertilizer prices appear to be a leading indicator of that heightened agriculture demand; fertilizer prices have risen 15 percent since 2005, Stegmann says.

"The greatest challenge to the world will not be \$100 oil (per barrel of light

crude). It will be getting food to the new middle class," Stegmann says, adding that 37 percent of the world's population is either Chinese or Indian.

The demand for more fertilizer, specifically access to reasonably priced urea, was a crucial market condition that prompted Lange-Stegmann to undergo a \$20-million expansion project to its St. Louis Urea Center, a urea storage and handling facility uniquely poised on the northern-most lock-free, ice-free terminal on the Mississippi River.

The expansion project also includes upgrades to Agrotain's Stabilized Nitrogen Center, which produces nitrogen fertilizer with a proprietary falling-curtain process.

The St. Louis Urea Center, which can operate all year with access to every major rail system in the United States in conjunction with river and road transportation, is crucial for the turf-grass and ornamental market because it provides access to affordable urea from international sources, Stegmann says.

Urea made in the United States has

become too expensive for many companies to produce because it is derived from hydrocarbons, mainly natural gas. As petroleum-based prices escalate, manufacturers must look abroad for the economically viable production of raw urea. Most of the urea imported through St. Louis comes from China, Russia and Saudi Arabia, Stegmann says.

“This is an important development because crop farmers can raise prices, but the turf and ornamental markets are incurring higher costs without any real mechanism to raise their prices,” he told the media and distributors at the center’s grand opening in September. “Fertilizer prices probably won’t go back to the way they were, probably ever.”

The world uses about 130 million metric tons of urea for fertilizer each year. The urea center has output capacity of about 1 million metric tons each year. Other fertilizer makers, including Agrium Advanced Technologies, lease warehouse space and handling services from the urea center.

The company also expanded Agrotain’s Stabilized Nitrogen Center, a manufacturing facility that can produce 125,000 tons of its falling-curtain UMAXX and UFLEXX fertilizers each year. Its proprietary process incorporates a urease inhibitor and a nitrification inhibitor to allow a more efficient and longer-lasting absorption process, according to the company. ■

‘Elite’ Assistants Attend Green Start Academy

By Larry Aylward, Editor in Chief

“You guys are the elite,” Scott Welge said. “That’s why you were chosen for this.”

Welge, director of marketing of green professional products for Bayer Environmental Science, was speaking to the 54 assistant golf course superintendents in attendance at the third-annual Green Start Academy, a two-day educational and networking event sponsored by Bayer Environmental Science and John Deere Golf. The event took place Oct. 1-3 at Bayer’s technical training center in Clayton, N.C., and John Deere’s Turf Care Manufacturing Facility in Fuquay Varina, N.C.

The 54 assistant superintendents were selected to attend the event by a panel of industry experts after being nominated by their respective superintendents and then submitting essays on why they should be invited. The assistants heard presentations from some of the top superintendents in the business, including

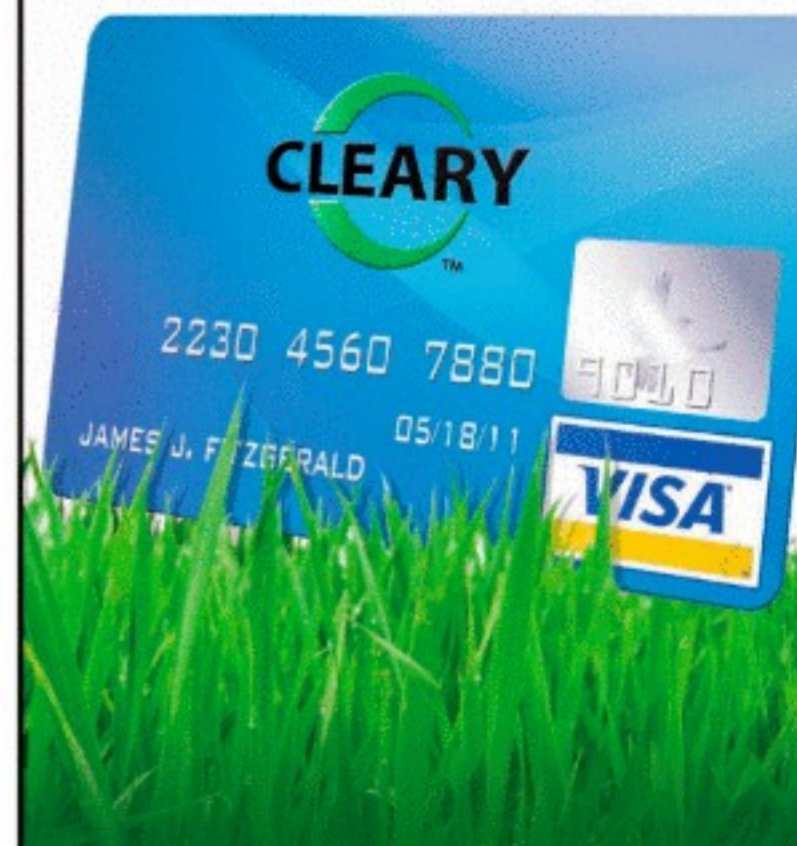
Bob Farren, director of grounds and golf course management at Pinehurst Resort & Country Club, and Bruce Williams, director of golf courses and grounds at the Los Angeles Country Club. They also heard from top technical personnel from Bayer and Deere as well as university professors and other industry professionals.

One of those professors was Dan Bowman from North Carolina State University, who spoke on water management. The roomful of assistants chuckled collectively after hearing Bowman say, “The worst thing to happen to golf turf is color television.”

Bowman, of course, was referring to TV networks that often portray golf courses as places of perfection with their well-manicured emerald-green turf, meticulously edged white-sand bunkers and placid blue-colored ponds. The assistants clearly understood Bowman’s point that they had to strike a balance between being responsible irrigators and providing golfers with fine-looking turf.

Continued on page 14

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Off The Fringe

“Assistants” — *Continued from page 13*

Bowman spoke about several water issues, mainly availability and quality. He asked the 54 assistant superintendents in attendance how many of them used reclaimed water at their golf courses. Not many hands went up.

“That will change,” Bowman told them, predicting that more golf courses will use reclaimed water for irrigation in the coming years.

The assistants also heard a presentation on “Career Development” from Dave Fearis, director of membership for the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America. Fearis reminded assistants that there’s more emphasis on the business end of golf than ever, and superintendents are expected to know the numbers game. “Revenue has really entered into your profession,” he said.

While Williams is regarded as a highly successful superintendent, he



Did someone lost their car keys? No, they’re watching for fire ants, which Bayer Environmental Science houses for pesticide study at Bayer’s development and training center in Clayton, N.C., where assistant superintendents were given a tour of the center’s grounds and research facilities.

told assistants he has never felt any job security, which Williams said keeps him in focus to perform at a high level in his job every day.

And even though Williams is at one of the top clubs in the country, he said that doesn’t remove him from any criticism. He told assistants he still takes his punches. “I’ve been called every insult you can think of,” he added.

Nick Hamon, Ph.D. and director of development and technical service for Bayer Environmental Science, gave a presentation on “Sustainable Development.” He told assistants that it takes about \$270 million to bring a new pesticide to market.

“We take this very seriously; we have to,” Hamon said in regard to the high cost. ■

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Hole of the

▶ Hole No. 15 | Pinehills Golf Club, Rees Jones Course | Plymouth, Mass.



PHOTO COURTESY: DON FLEET

Month

Hole Stats

Distance: 509 yards

Par 5

The Turf

Green: *L93 bentgrass*

Fairway: *Penntrio bentgrass*

With more than 300 acres of rolling hills punctuated by dramatic, glacially carved hollows and ridges, Pinehills Golf Club is the setting for two 18-hole championship courses, one designed by Rees Jones and the other by Jack Nicklaus Jr.

The Rees Jones course, which opened in 2001, is a 7,175-yard, par-72 course with diverse terrain that includes native ridges and high points for a variety of different tee and green sites.



Natural hazards and elevation changes give each hole its own identity. Surrounded by lush pine trees, hole No. 15 is not only considered by many players to be the most beautiful hole on the course, but also one of the more challenging because of its dramatic differences in elevation.

Once players hit their tee shots over the deep hollow, their second shots, if they choose to go for the green, must clear three bunkers guarding the green. If they choose to lay up, accuracy is a must as bunkers guard both sides of the fairway.

Controlling dollar spot on No. 15 has been a challenge for Certified Superintendent Joe Felicetti, who has been in charge of both courses for nine years. This year, Felicetti and his 45-person crew added Emerald® fungicide to their spray program on fairways.

"For the first time this year, we applied Emerald in the late spring and then again in late summer," Felicetti said. "We feel that without these two additional applications, our dollar spot would have been much worse this season. We are very pleased with the results and intend to continue this program."

Felicetti's applications were made at a rate of 0.18 ounces per 1,000 square feet to keep the disease at bay.

Emerald fungicide provides exceptional control of dollar spot with long-term results. For more information, contact your distributor or BASF at www.betterturf.com.

To learn more about Emerald® and BASF, visit www.betterturf.com and www.basfturftalk.com.



GOLFDOM'S HOLE OF THE MONTH IS MADE POSSIBLE BY:



Are you part of the problem or part of the solution? Before you break out the tar and feathers, be honest in the evaluation of your irrigation scheduling and pesticide and fertilizer applications and, yes, even your property's carbon footprint.

After a recent conversation with a supplier, I was prompted to look inward at our industry rather than taking activists and local politicians to task for their non-scientific approach to environmental protection. If we are claiming some sort of immunity because of best management practices, advanced technology, stewardship programs and the like, then we'd better take a harder look at our own house.

This supplier talked about a client whose new million-dollar irrigation system was set on 20-minute run times regardless of location and head type. That old wall-to-wall, one-size-fits-all management mentality went out with automobile tail fins.

With water restrictions eroding our ability to manage turf in drought conditions, we need these lazy thinkers to be tweaking evapotranspiration rates based on real observation of turfgrass performance and not just arbitrary, convenient settings. We need to find real, practical ways to save water in our irrigation programs.

If you don't have a computerized irrigation system, you can still turn back the dial a few minutes on a number of stations. At 50 gallons to 60 gallons per minute, that adds up to measurable savings. It's time to get away from defensive watering and adopt a water-wise programming mentality. We have to do it during water shortage orders, so why not all year?

Consider the choice of watering greens, tees and fairways versus watering roughs between greens and tees and many tee slopes — isn't it a slam dunk? What kind of statement could it make if every golf course embarked on a program to take a couple of acres per year out of intense or routine maintenance? It would save water, chemicals, fertilizer, labor, fuel and tight budget dollars. Sounds to me like an environmentally and economically sound idea to me.

I know courses that have converted between

Some Golf Critics Have Cause to Carp

BY JOEL JACKSON



ENVIRONMENTAL
AWARENESS IS HERE
TO STAY, BUT A FEW
KNUCKLEHEADS OUT
THERE STILL DON'T
GET IT

25 acres to 40 acres of formerly maintained turfgrass into naturalized native plant habitat. Many modern designs are reflecting the target golf concept of having fewer irrigated turf acres without sacrificing aesthetics or playability.

When south Florida was amid its phase-3 water restrictions (45 percent reduction) earlier this year, superintendents and golfers learned that the turfgrass could get by on less water. It took some effort; turfgrass managers had to be diligent and observant about tweaking system run times and schedules each day. It wasn't easy, but many learned irrigation stations could be cut back on time, and the turf did not suffer. The water management districts moved our cheese. We were out of our comfort zone, but the turfgrass survived.

Environmental awareness is here to stay, and there are a few knuckleheads out there who still don't get it. These stragglers keep the spotlight on golf as a target for activists. I interview a lot of superintendents during the year and, by and large, they are doing a very credible job of managing natural resources.

Be that as it may, we will always be held to a higher standard of performance because we are so visible, and we must rise to the challenge. When some of those in our ranks over-water, over-fertilize or over-spray, they are jeopardizing the continued use of some of our critical products and water itself.

Water was the main focus in Florida because of the recent drought, but these Draconian regulations won't stay in the Southeast if superintendents fail to make it a personal goal to maximize the opportunities to minimize all of the inputs on golf courses. Put yourself in a conservation state of mind, for the good of your profession.

Certified superintendent Joel Jackson is executive director of the Florida GCSA.

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If we want to grow the game, the first-tee experience needs to be revisited.

No, not *that* First Tee.

I'm talking about the first tee where we all tee it up nervously, wondering who is watching and what wretched thing we're going to do in front of prying eyes.

No sane golfer enjoys the opening tee shot or experiences a nerve-free start to the day. But because many golf architects decided long ago that watching duffers line out to shortstop translates to fun viewing or some sort of rite-of-passage gut check, all too many first tees are placed next to the clubhouse or starters shack.

The operation side's ability to control the first tee — as if herds of golfers might sneak by — has placed too many opening tee shots where everyone can watch. However, this increases the noise from idle chatter or the inevitable beeping golf cars that help get your round off to a rip-roaring start.

While we've all admired the stories of golfers overcoming stage fright to strike an opening tee shot against the backdrop of clanking dishes and lunchtime chatter at Merion Golf Club or some other spot, there just isn't much fun in such a setup. That fine club's dining terrace abuts the tee, and the only thing worse than hearing the quiet chit-chat of diners is the silence that falls when they stop to watch you flail away at your opening shot.

Equally nerve-wracking is the tee shot made more complicated because of increased nervousness associated with teeing off from high above at a Riviera Country Club or Bethpage Black. Both typically include an audience, though it is not always one attentive to the need for silence.

The most widely revered opening tees are small, elevated and would have been placed in the main dining room if they could grow grass indoors. While that desire may make them function friendly and dramatic, such intimacy can often prove just a bit too quaint.

That's why the ideal starting box is set slightly away from the commotion. Oh, it's still in view of the starter and clubhouse, and hopefully not far from the warm-up area.

What to Do About the First Tee?

BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD



HOW ABOUT
PLACING THE
STARTING BOX
SLIGHTLY AWAY
FROM ALL OF THE
COMMOTION

Sometimes the tee is even part of the practice putting green. Even better, a small green is cut into the tee complex, allowing for a few final putts as you wait for your group to assemble. Sure, this encourages the occasional loser to hang around the tee, but in most cases it has the opposite effect — announcing that the first tee area is for golfers about to go out. And no one else.

Preferred is the subdued beginning found at Pine Valley Golf Club or Winged Foot Golf Club, where the ensuing architecture is anything but mellow. Those great places feature tees that rest low or flat to the surrounding ground and just a bit away from the clubhouse activity. Yet, they are never so far to rule out a quick run back to the locker room for a forgotten sweater.

The lower-profile opening tee shot is essential because it increases the likelihood of beginning a round with your dignity intact, since even the meekest of tee shots can be found and played.

Of course, you can't go spontaneously redesign your first tee now that you've read this brilliant column. However, do keep in mind the importance of a certain first-tee ambiance. Perhaps start by not parking golf cars so close to the tee and eliminating other forms of congestion and general loitering. While a wall of hedges looks ridiculous, some nice landscaping to buffer the tees from golf cars and gawkers will discourage some from hanging around.

Anything to improve the first-tee experience will be a boon for your course and the game.

Golfdom Contributing Editor Geoff Shackelford can be reached at geoffshac@aol.com.