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Golfdom

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With an **AIM** to **PLEASE**



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Superintendents know that golfers are their bread and butter. Photo by iStock International Inc.



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Turfgrass Trends


This month, *Golfdom's* practical research digest discusses how to differentiate between wear and compaction, and how their interaction affects turf stress. Also, a combination of fertigation and subsurface drip irrigation could provide quality turfgrass while reducing possible nitrate-nitrogen contamination and water use. See pages 59-63.

Keep Up to Date




Check out our up-to-date news at www.golfdom.com. Also, watch your e-mail inboxes for our electronic newsletters, including *The Insider*, *On the Green*, *Chip Shots*, *Puttin' Down Roots* and *Inside Irrigation*.

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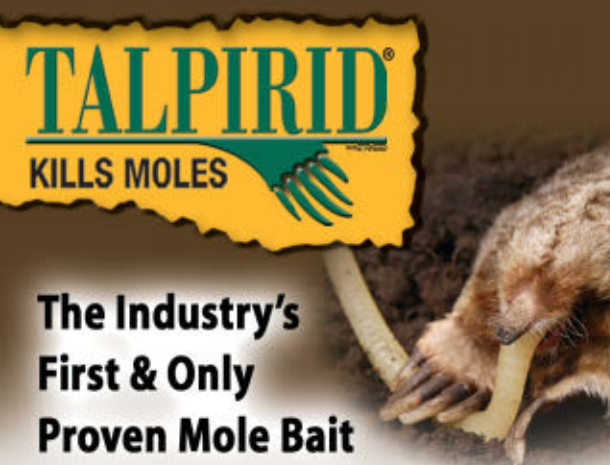
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We work in a wonderful world, this small sphere known as the golf course industry. Yet, sometimes we aren't on the same planet

when it comes to some of the industry's most vital issues. Consider golf and the environment.

And consider this year's U.S. Open, played in June at Pebble Beach Golf Links. I'm convinced the United States Golf Association was determined to make an agronomic environmental statement with the course's look and setup. But the message hit home like a Big Bertha driver over the head.

New USGA President Jim Hyler talked up how golf needs to be a better environmental steward during NBC's telecast of the tournament. Hyler seems to be the catalyst behind the USGA's ramped-up environmental approach. He's on record as saying that "brown can become the new green" and that he prefers "firm and fast" conditions. Pebble Beach, especially the course's greens, looked brown, all right, and they were as firm and fast as a pool table's new felt.

But the brown greens made for a lot of negative water-cooler talk, and not just among the Joe Golfers of the world. Golf course superintendents were talking, too. And many of them didn't like what they saw.

Golfdom recently surveyed about 100 superintendents and asked them their opinions on how the greens looked. A whopping 38 percent said, "I think the greens looked awful."

It's safe to say that most golf fans watching the U.S. Open on TV couldn't believe their eyes when they saw Pebble Beach's greens. It wasn't the Pebble Beach they'd seen on TV in the past.

Now, this is not to pick on Pebble Beach (although I wouldn't want to work in its marketing department right now). The course's superintendent, Chris Dalhamer, and his experienced crew consistently turn out one of the best golf courses in the world. What people saw during the U.S. Open was a dictate by the USGA to provide a tough test of golf.

Don't get me wrong, there's nothing wrong with firm and fast conditions. And there's nothing

The Golf Industry's Mixed Message

BY LARRY AYLWARD



I'M ALL FOR GOLF COURSES GETTING AWAY FROM THEIR SUPER-MODEL LOOKS, BUT THIS TRANSFORMATION MUST OCCUR SLOWLY AND SUBTLY

ing wrong with saying turfgrass doesn't need to be as green and lush as a rain forest. But it's obvious to me that what people saw on TV at Pebble Beach was just too much "brown" for them to stomach at one time.

The USGA's Pat Gross, an agronomist with the association's Green Section who was involved with getting Pebble Beach ready for the tournament, said "cosmetics and appearance were not high on the priority list at Pebble Beach." But the problem is that cosmetics and appearance *are* high on the priority list at most golf courses that host televised professional events. That includes the mother of all picture-perfect golf courses, Augusta National, seen by millions in its emerald-green glory during Masters week in April.

Alas, the golf course industry is sending a mixed message. It's no wonder people were asking, "What happened to Pebble Beach's greens?"

I'm all for golf courses getting away from their super-model looks, but this transformation must occur slowly and subtly. Golfers have been conditioned to *expect* perfect-looking golf courses, and superintendents have been conditioned to *provide* perfect-looking golf courses. This dynamic isn't going to change overnight.

Hyler and the USGA also need to come up with a better word than "brown" if they want to replace the word "green." Many people, including superintendents, believe that "brown" turf equates to dead turf.

And, by the way, what's wrong with green turf? Why are so many people determined on taking the green out of golf?

I guess that's another story for another day.

Aylward can be reached at larry@questex.com.

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Off The Fringe

Business briefs

Rounds down 3 percent for the year

Golf rounds were down 2.9 percent in May compared to the same month in 2009, according to a survey of 3,870 courses by Golf Datatech. Rounds are down 3 percent for the year.

Rounds were down substantially in the West, up to 17.5 percent in Idaho, Wyoming and Montana. Rounds were up 8.2 percent in the New England area in May, and they're up 10.1 percent in that region for the year.

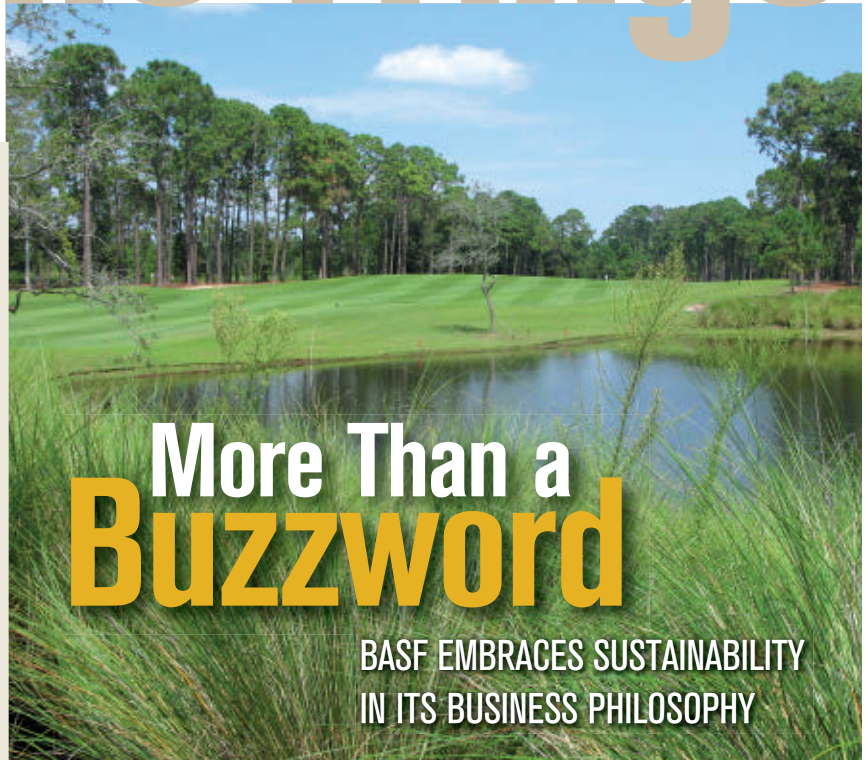
Green shoot for the golf economy

Golf may be slow in much of the country but industry vendors remain committed to the game in North Carolina and South Carolina. Commercial suppliers have come out early and strong in support of this year's Carolinas Golf Course Superintendents Association Conference and Trade Show in November in Myrtle Beach, S.C., according to a Carolinas GCSA news release.

Nearly 250 exhibit booths, or more than two-thirds of those available, have already sold even though the event is still almost five months away. That number exceeds sales for the same time last year, even though registration opened nearly a month later this time around.

"This is a great show of confidence in the game in our region," says Carolinas GCSA Executive Director Tim Kreger. "For so many of our vendors to commit so heavily so far in advance says something about their faith in the game here and the men and women who present the courses we play on."

The Carolinas GCSA's annual event is the largest regional conference and trade show for superintendents in the country. ■



More Than a Buzzword

BASF EMBRACES SUSTAINABILITY
IN ITS BUSINESS PHILOSOPHY

By Larry Aylward, Editor in Chief

The big buzzword in agriculture, which has filtered down to the golf course maintenance industry, is "sustainability." Then again, the "S" word seems to be the buzzword in just about every industry these days.

Many companies that supply equipment and chemicals to the golf course maintenance industry have grasped the sustainability concept. One of the companies, BASF, recently held a media summit in Chicago to discuss sustainability. The two-day event, held in June, focused on sustainability in agriculture and turfgrass maintenance, as well as other matters pertaining to the issue.

Jan Buberl, who assumed the role

of BASF's director of specialty products last October, told *Golfdom* that golf course superintendents are aware of sustainability, even though they might refer to it as another term.

"It's our job to make them aware and conscious of the concept," Buberl said. "We want to know what we can do and what we can offer as a company to help in the situation."

Superintendents may be resistant to sustainability, especially if they don't understand its nuances.

"It's our job to make them more comfortable with it, and it's an educational process," says Buberl says, who stresses that superintendents must be educated about the balanced approach of sustainability, which will allow them to do their jobs better in the long run.

Continued on page 12

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What They're Saying About *You*

ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS LIKE BEYOND PESTICIDES SPREAD A BAD MESSAGE ABOUT PESTICIDES **By Nicole Wisniewski**

As golf course superintendents, you may be faced with questions regarding pesticides and the effectiveness of the tools you use daily. It's important to be aware of "what you're up against" when it comes to the information your customers may be getting from groups who oppose the use of pesticides.

In May, the 28th National Pesticide Forum, "Greening the Community," was held by Beyond Pesticides in Cleveland. During the opening session, "Pesticides 101," Caroline Cox, a Beyond Pesticides board member and research director for the Center for Environmental Health in Oakland, Calif., outlined the "10 Reasons Not To Use Pesticides," renaming her session to clarify her message.

Here are a few of the points this organization is spreading to the general public:

► **Pesticides don't solve pest problems.**

"If pesticides really solved pest problems, we wouldn't use them repeatedly," Cox explained. "Every year in the U.S., a billion pesticides are used. The amount isn't going down."

► **Pesticides are hazardous to human health.** Three hundred million pounds of cancer-causing pesticides and 150 million pounds of pesticides that cause reproduction problems like miscarriages or birth defects are used annually, Cox told the group.

► **Pesticides cause special problems for children.** "For their size, children

drink more water and eat more food than adults do," she said. "Their play exposes them to pesticides. They do somersaults on the lawn and they sprawl out on the carpet to read a book. All of these things increase their exposure to pesticides."

Kids are also growing and developing, she added. "If they're exposed to pesticides when they're at critical stages of growth or development and their growth changes, this is something they have to live with for life. For instance, some common pesticides appear to affect the developing brain so a child's brain will be different when [he or she] grows up."

► **Pesticides contaminate water and air.** The U.S. Department of Agriculture's

National Monitoring Program found 57 pesticides in public drinking water samples in 2009, and the U.S. Geological Survey found pesticides in 90 percent to 100 percent of rivers and streams they tested in 2006. After stating these facts, Cox concluded that "pesticides used on lawn and roadsides do end up in urban streams and rivers."

► **Pesticides are hazardous to fish and birds.** "We share the planet with other living things and they pay the price as a result of our pesticide use," Cox said, adding that 100 million pounds of pesticides per year kill fish, according to the U.S. Geological Survey.

► **Pesticide health and safety testing is conducted by pesticide manufacturers.** "The

Continued on page 15



Environmental groups are spreading the word that pesticides are just plain evil. Superintendents need to take a stand.



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Off The Fringe

He's Got Game

BUT GREGG BRENINGMEYER SAYS HE NEEDS TO PLAY GOOD GOLF TO CONDUCT GOOD BUSINESS

By Larry Aylward, Editor in Chief

Gregg Breningmeyer is a fine golfer. But he'd better be, because he says he has to be.

Breningmeyer, group director of sales and marketing for John Deere Golf, is a 7-handicap player who used to be an 18-handicap player four years ago and even higher before that. Because of his job — he plays a



lot of golf with John Deere Golf clients on the course — Breningmeyer worked hard to improve his game on his own dime.

“Frankly, I dedicated myself to getting better because I was embarrassing myself,” Breningmeyer says. “I was doing my business relationships

more harm than good by playing poorly.”

Breningmeyer travels frequently and all over the world. He has played golf in

places that a lot of people have never heard of. And most of the people Breningmeyer plays with, of course, are associated with golf courses as owners, general managers, superintendents and in other capacities. Most are very competent players. So you can see why Breningmeyer wanted to be as good or better than his playing partners.

“Think about it from a purely business relationship: Where else can you get a customer’s undivided attention and time for five hours than the golf course?” Breningmeyer asks. “But you don’t want that time to be torture, or you won’t get another five hours with that customer.

“That’s what drove me to get better,” he adds. “Plus, I love the game.”

Funny thing, Breningmeyer says he has closed many deals with clients on golf courses without even talking business. “It’s because I went out and made friends with them and played golf with them, and we had a good time together,” he says. “That alone pushed the deal in my favor.

“This is a relationship-driven business,” he adds. “But golf sales is relationship selling on steroids. That’s why I spent my own money and found myself a coach and told him, ‘Turn me into a good golfer in a year.’”

Indeed, a 7-handicapper is a pretty good golfer. ■

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