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# Off The Fringe

**BUZZWORD** *Continued from page 6*

Stefan Marcinowski, a member of BASF's board of executive directors, said BASF has created a forum to discuss agricultural sustainability and practical solutions to help farmers with the concept.

"Farmers have a tremendous responsibility to produce more than ever while continuing to protect the environment for future generations," Marcinowski says. "Our conversations with representatives from stakeholders throughout the value chain will help to bring together the many visions of agricultural sustainability to a practical point of what growers need from all of us."

During his presentation during the summit, Markus Heldt, president of BASF Crop Protection, said new pesticide packaging will help farmers use pesticides safer and faster. It's safe

to assume the same holds true at the specialty products level.

While it's a buzzword now, Buberl expects "sustainability" will turn into something much more.

"We're convinced it's [for real]," he says.

To BASF, sustainability is a "journey" and a "commitment," Buberl says. There will always be new challenges in nature, including new pests and disease, and sustainability will always play a role.

"For us, it's a business principle and a journey that doesn't have an end point," he says.

One thing is for certain with BASF. The company will not remove its tagline, "The Chemical Company," from its logo. While sustainability is about protecting the environment, chemicals play a safe role in doing that, Buberl believes.



**BASF's Jan Buberl says "sustainability is a business principle and a journey that doesn't have an end point."**

"It's in our DNA, it's at our core," Buberl says of the tagline. "And it's our job to explain what we do and make more people comfortable with it." ■

PHOTO BY: LARRY AYLWARD

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# Off The Fringe

**SAYING** *Continued from page 8*

government does not test pesticides — they ask companies that make them to test them,” Cox said. “If you profit from a product and test it, isn’t there a built-in conflict of interest?”

► **Pesticides are hazardous to pets.**

“A good way to talk to people about pesticides is talk to them about pets,” Cox offered the group, adding that the American Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals reported more than 30,000 pesticide-poisoned pets in a single year (2005). She also pointed specifically to the use of lawn care herbicides as a reason for the increased risk of pet cancer.

► **Pesticides have too many secrets.** Pesticide ingredients are divided into active and inert, Cox explained, “so you wouldn’t know exactly what chemicals were used on your block because a

**“We share the planet with other living things and they pay the price as a result of our pesticide use.”**

— CAROLINE COX

good percentage of them could be inert and not listed on the label.”

Do yourself — and your industry — a favor and become educated about the true benefits of pesticides and be prepared to speak knowledgeably when faced with questions regarding their harmful effects. ■

*Wisniewski is editor in chief of Landscape Management, Golfdom's sister publication.*

## “Quotable

**“It’s important to remember that we’re in the customer service business. We have to work with our customers and the owners to tell them what we’re doing.”**

— *Mike Morris, certified superintendent of Crystal Downs Country Club in Frankfort, Mich., on the realities of being a superintendent in 2010.*

**“The mutual goal of the USGA and Pebble Beach was to provide firm, smooth, and fast putting greens to test the skills of the best players. Cosmetics and appearance were not high on the priority list.”**

— *Pat Gross, U.S. Green Section southwest region director, on the “mottled” greens at the U.S. Open*

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**T**here's no doubt we're victims of stereotyping. A recent example is activist groups lumping fertilizers in a group known as major pollutants. In return, we lump these environmentalists into a group of righteous, self-serving, misinformed do-gooders.

However, if we stop generalizing, we see environmental groups like Audubon International reaching out and working with us on an international scale. The organization learns our needs, helps us reduce our inputs and shows us ways we can achieve the same results. It's called cooperation. There are many similar efforts with water-management districts, local wildlife refuges and others who work with local chapters to educate each other about best management practices.

I remember the time I represented the golf and leisure industries at an event by the South Florida Water Management District's Task Force on Water Conservation. I was introduced to a woman, who upon noticing the golf course superintendents association title on my badge, rolled her eyes in a dismissive oh-no-you're-one-of-those looks. I immediately lumped her into that self-righteous group.

About a month later, I was invited at the 11th hour to give a presentation on golf and water use. Fortunately, I already had a PowerPoint presentation of the subject on my laptop. I was ready to tell our story with a few tweaks and updates the night before.

I couldn't help but notice the priceless looks of surprise on some environmentalists' faces when I showed them the golf industry's water-use numbers compared to other major users of water, especially homeowners. I also told them about the golf industry's use of reclaimed water, how modern golf course design features minimize irrigated turf, projects where out-of-play areas were converted to native areas, and computerized-control irrigation systems. It's amazing what a little factual education can do to destroy stereotyping.

How many times have we been guilty of lumping and clumping groups, such as golf pros, vocal members, chapter cliques, high-budget private clubs, municipal goat ranches,

## Time to Stop the Stereotyping

BY JOEL JACKSON



WE HAVE FOLKS  
WITHIN OUR OWN  
RANKS WHO CUT  
CORNERS, IGNORE  
LABELS AND VIOLATE  
REGULATIONS

snake oil and bugs in a jug? The reason I bring up some of our own internal off-hand lumping is that we have folks within our own ranks who cut corners, ignore labels and violate regulations.

Have you ever heard of someone applying ag-grade pesticides in clear violation of the label to save money? Ever mixed or applied chemicals without wearing the proper personal protective equipment? Ever see a mix load or wash rack area drain into a ditch or canal leading to other water bodies? Ever see a chemical storage room with wooden shelves? Though in the minority, these things still happen, and these potentially rotten apples can spoil the whole barrel lumped as golf courses.

It's hard enough to explain to politicians and regulators about the fate of fertilizers and pesticides when properly applied to turfgrass to try to avoid well-intended but totally non-science based ordinances. We don't need horror stories about misapplications and safety violations on the six o'clock news to add to the stereotyping stampede.

We can't escape the wave of environmental issues that are shaping our world, and the Gulf oil spill has only magnified and intensified the scrutiny of any industry that uses potential pollutant products. Look for the pressure for more bans and regulations to ramp up even more.

However, the great thing about most superintendents is they're very creative, analytical, versatile and pragmatic. They find ways to solve problems using science, networking and imagination.

Wouldn't it be a wonderful thing if one day soon the media and the public lumped us into a group predominantly known as environmental stewards?

---

*Certified Superintendent Joel Jackson is Executive Director of the Florida GCSA.*



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**A**lthough discussed for generations, golf course “firmness,” specifically on putting greens, has become a buzzword in golf course maintenance circles.

Whereas achieving green speed or ball roll has consumed much of putting green maintenance the last 40 years, the trend is now about green firmness.

I don’t intend to minimize the negative impact that excessive ball roll can cause to putting green health, but the recent advancements in equipment technology and the knowledge generated on maintaining high-quality turf help offset this matter. Golf course superintendents who possess the technology and knowledge can achieve desired green speeds on a consistent bases with much less of risk for turf loss than in past years.

Green firmness, however, is the new challenge golf courses face in achieving ideal green quality. How firm a green becomes as measured by the United States Golf Association’s TruFirm or a Clegg Impact Hammer is impacted by other factors than just “drying” out a green.

Yes, rootzone moisture is important, but can a green become too dry and lose firmness? I don’t know. But an interesting analogy was given to me by someone working with sand bunkers.

If bunker sand is too dry, it becomes soft and fluffy — the opposite of firm. It’s not uncommon in this situation to add water to firm up bunkers. Obviously, some problems exist with that analogy, like the impact root systems have on rootzone stabilization, but there’s more to firmness than soil moisture. There’s no doubt the repetitive nature of maintenance practices like mowing and rolling contribute to surface firmness (researchers are starting to look at this).

Unfortunately, current discussion of golf course firmness at least on the extreme end is that the course has to be brown or on life support. And if your course isn’t, then it must be green and lush from overwatering. I find this rather incredulous.

## There’s a New Buzzword in Town

BY KARL DANNEBERGER



NUMEROUS FACTORS  
TO ACHIEVE THE  
DESIRED FIRMNESS  
WILL DEPEND ON  
MEASUREMENTS  
AND QUANTIFICATION  
OF FIRMNESS, AND  
THEN WHAT THOSE  
NUMBERS MEAN TO  
A GOLF COURSE

The most common example used for “ideal” firmness condition is links courses, which, by definition and the nature of their habitats, lie on sandy or droughty soils along river estuaries. Under these conditions, gaining firmness is critical to how the course plays. In windy conditions, playing “along the ground” is the essence of links courses, thus playing a firm links course requires large greens and approachable fronts. Unfortunately, the vast majority of golf courses are not links courses.

What I find exciting, challenging and maybe a headache for many is how do you bring the desired firmness to non-link golf courses where part of the character of these courses is parkland in nature? Finding the appropriate level of firmness across a spectrum of climatic conditions, soil conditions, course design and golfer expectation is the challenge.

It will not be as easy as shutting off the water. Numerous factors to achieve the desired firmness will depend on measurements and quantification of firmness, and then what those numbers mean to a golf course. And then determining desired moisture level or range in conjunction with the appropriate cultural practices of mowing, rolling, topdressing, etc., to achieve the level of firmness and smoothness.

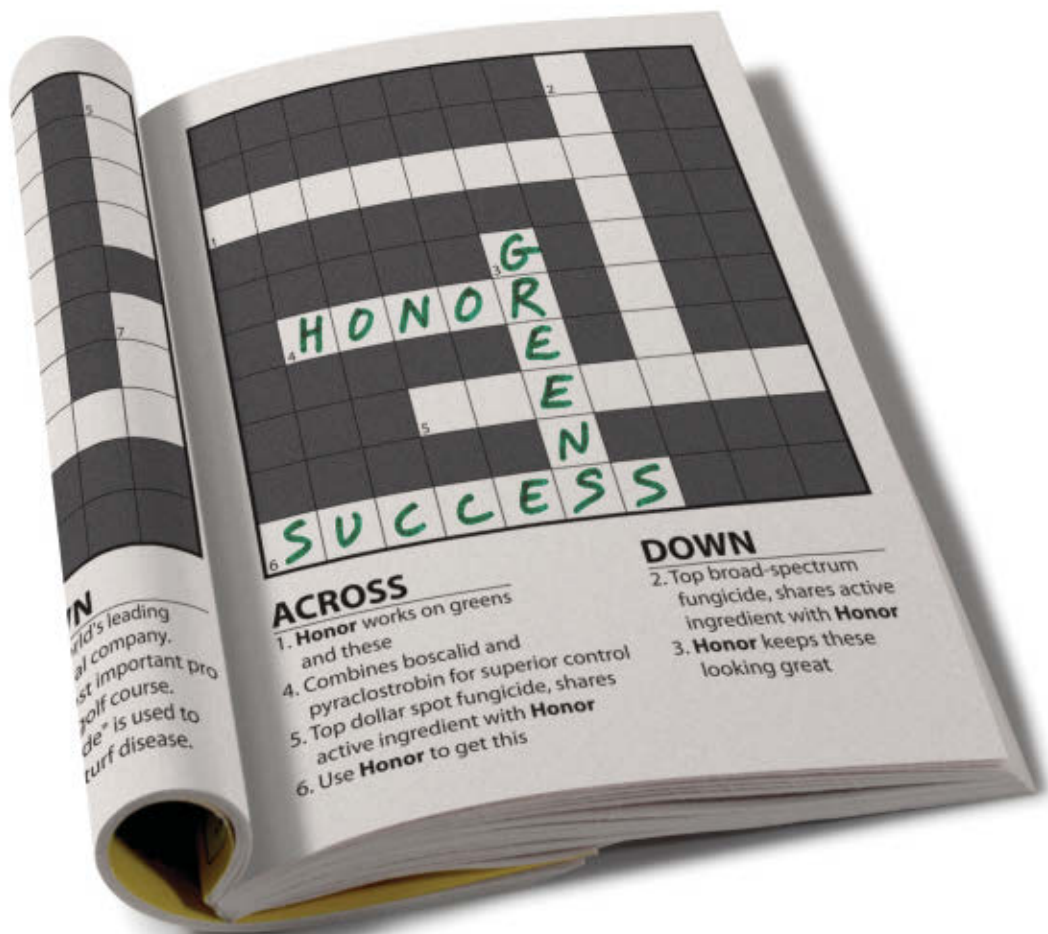
The technology advancements, along with the superintendent’s knowledge, will be put to the full test.

Who’s to say you can’t have firm surfaces and green turf, too?

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*Karl Danneberger, Ph.D., Golfdom’s science editor and a turfgrass professor from The Ohio State University, can be reached at danneberger.1@osu.edu.*





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# With an **AIM** to **PLE**

Despite tight maintenance budgets, superintendents continue to provide *players* the best conditions possible

**A**n anxious Steve Hammon waits and wonders if the members of Traverse City (Mich.) Golf & Country Club will soon see the results of his maintenance budget cuts the past two years.

Hammon, the club's golf course superintendent, had to reduce his course's budget 7 percent in 2009 and another 9 percent this year because of this dilemma known as the Great Recession. Alas, things have changed as far as work getting done at Traverse City. Some tasks are getting done differently, and some aren't getting done at all. But if members have noticed anything, they're not saying.

"The core golf course maintenance work and conditions are still unchanged and the membership has not noticed anything different . . . yet," Hammon says.

Hammon, of course, is not alone in his anxiety. Any superintendent whose course maintenance budget has been cut probably feels the same way. That's because a reduced maintenance budget doesn't necessarily equate to an understanding golfer, who will still demand top conditions for his money spent.

About 65 percent of superintendents said they cut their maintenance budgets in 2009, the majority of them (41 percent) reducing their budgets between 5 percent and 10 percent, according to a *Golfdom* survey of nearly 600 superintendents. That said,

some superintendents are probably getting accustomed to working with less money, considering they're in the second and third years of budget cuts.

It's tough for Jim Loke, the certified golf course superintendent of Bent Creek Country Club in Lititz, Pa., to see his maintenance budget reduced. But while Loke is a stickler for providing tournament-like conditions daily, nobody has to explain to him why the reductions occurred.

"For the most part, we're accomplishing the visual effects of those standards," says Loke, who didn't reveal how much his budget has been reduced the past few years.

The 64-year-old Loke remembers tending turf back in the 1970s when preventive maintenance wasn't practiced much. "We waited until we saw the effects of disease, and then we sprayed," he says.

But preventive maintenance eventually became the norm for many golf maintenance

PHOTO BY: ISTOCK INTERNATIONAL INC.

BY LARRY AYLWARD,