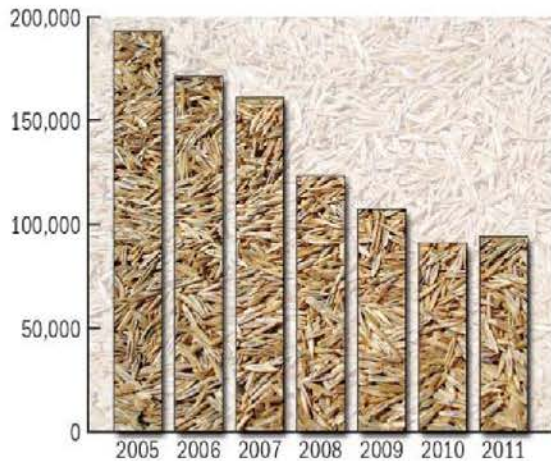


## PERENNIAL RYEGRASS DIMINISHMENT BY ACRE IN THE WILLAMETTE VALLEY



SOURCE: OREGON SEED COUNCIL

Continued from page 29

John Rector, turf products manager for Barenbrug, echoes Tubbs' sentiment about the declining economy in 2008, when superintendents started to gradually cut back on overseeding because they were constrained by shrinking budgets.

"Superintendents are tied to their budgets when it comes to purchasing seed for overseeding," says Rector, acknowledging the dramatic fluctuation in the cost of ryegrass the past six years. "These fluctuations make it that much more difficult to accurately budget these costs."

The bottom line is, economics has changed the way superintendents approach golf course maintenance, overseeding included, says Wayne Horman of Landmark Turf & Native Seed. Perennial ryegrass, for example, is 25 cents more per pound than last year. Distributors paid 71 cents, and now it's 96 cents.

"If there's a lot of dead grass this spring, no matter where, we'll be short on ryegrass," Horman says. "More acres aren't being grown, because growers have found more profitable crops — wheat, corn and soybeans, for example — to grow. I don't think superintendents know how short we can be."

That scenario is the opposite of what happened in 2010, when there was an oversupply of perennial ryegrass, which

is grown in Oregon, Washington, Canada and Northern Minnesota.

"New construction was way down, and superintendents' budgets were very tight, so growers were told the industry didn't need ryegrass," Horman says. "As a result, they gradually cut back 25 to 30 percent a year. It was cheaper to plant wheat, corn and soybeans because growers were making more money with those crops."

Worldwide demand for wheat began to rise about this same time and replaced 40 percent of the cool-season turfgrass production, which was far less profitable. The cost of ryegrass will remain high as long as world-

wide demand for wheat outstrips supplies, Tubbs says.

"There are 220,000 acres of wheat that used to be all grass in the Pacific Northwest," he says. "There has been a steady decline of most cool-season grass acreage since 2008. We lost 25 percent of it that isn't coming back."

"Ten years ago, there were a few thousand acres of wheat in Oregon's Willamette Valley, and in 2012, there were 135,000 acres harvested," Rector adds.

The profitability and competition from other agriculture products, such as wheat, corn and vegetables, increased options for growers. When seed prices crashed in 2009-2010 and seed acres declined, seed growers looked for options and found rising prices for grain an alternative. However, with increased seed prices, the tide might be shifting again toward grass seed.

"Growers generally like crop rotations

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Continued from page 31

and higher-priced seed, and increased demand fits nicely into the mix,” Rector says. “With seed companies back looking for acres and prices favorably competing, we’ll likely seed more acres return to grass seed in the near future.”

## Impact

The most significant impact of the economic downturn in the perennial ryegrass market is on overseeding in the South. However, each market, and for that matter, each course, is different. The overseeding market in Palm Springs, Calif., is different than markets in Arizona, which are different than a blue-collar club in North Carolina, where it just might order a cheap seed to keep turf green throughout the winter. Still, less overseeding is occurring in the South because there’s less perennial ryegrass available.

It’s no secret superintendents are a resilient bunch. So, whether it’s because of a tight budget or lack of available seed, they’ll do something different, and golfers will adjust to that. They might be willing not to overseed wall to wall, for example. Furthermore, the new ultradwarf bermudagrasses contribute to the reduction of overseeding greens in the South.

Lower seeding rates persist. About 10 years ago, the average seeding rate was 600 to 800 pounds per acre; now it’s 400 to 600 pounds per acre, Tubbs says. To put seeding rates into a broader perspective, they were at 250 pounds per acre in the 1970s and increased to as high as 800 to 1,000 pounds per acre a couple decades later because the price was so cheap.

“In Palm Springs, there are some superintendents who aren’t overseeding the roughs anymore and are calling it the links look,” Tubbs says wryly. “Five years ago that wouldn’t be the case. Now we’re seeing more acceptance of that.”

That said, Tubbs doesn’t see a drastic difference in playing conditions with the lower seeding rates.

“It all comes back to what golfers want,” Horman says.

Lower seeding rates equate to more coated seed (polymer, water absorbing), all trying to get better results (more seed that survives) with less seed, Horman says.

“The good point of all this is that there’s less turf to mow, water and fertilize. There’s more sustainability. It’s just not good if you’re a seed dealer,” Tubbs says.

In some ways, the ryegrass market has come full circle with perennials and annuals as the industry returns to overseeding with improved turf-type annuals because of the cost of perennials.

“It’s all relative,” Tubbs says.

An eight-year-old Barenbrug project called Turf Annuals validates Tubbs’ point. To provide superintendents with an option to the traditional use of perennial ryegrass for overseeding, the company embarked on a turf project to signifi-

## FOR WHAT IT’S WORTH

Perennial ryegrass, which is the largest turfgrass variety by volume for golf courses, had a production value of **\$160 million** in 2007. It’s now **\$111,088**.

SOURCE: TURF MERCHANTS

cantly improve the turf quality of annual ryegrass, which provides some attractive overseeding traits but not the turf quality. Vigorous out of the ground and quick to establish, SOS provides superintendents an option to perennials.

“It can be seeded later in the fall, even with soil temperatures in the low to mid-40s,” Rector says. “It features a naturally smooth spring transition while providing significantly improved turf quality compared to traditional annual ryegrass.”

With seed yields significantly higher than perennial ryegrass, SOS is economical and there’s no need for chemical transition. An alternative for roughs, fairways, driving ranges or other club turf areas, SOS can be mixed with perennials or in stand-alone turf annual blends.

Other less likely alternatives to overseeding with perennial ryegrass include heat-tolerant bluegrass. For example, the Country Club of Birmingham (Ala.) has

bluegrass roughs. *Poa trivialis* has been used to overseed rough, but it’s not as cost effective as rye. It comes down to a balance of aesthetics and agronomics.

“All species of seed will increase in cost, it comes down to finding acres,” Horman says.

## A look ahead

While the industry might never see the levels of overseeding that occurred the past decade, the need for permanent turf and overseeded perennial ryegrass has begun to stabilize and improve. And with it will come a need for higher yielding varieties and more acreage.

“As for the new crop of 2013, we’re hoping we don’t see a repeat of 2012,” says Rector, citing the perfect storm of harvest complications last summer that left the seed industry gasping for breath.

A cold wet spring, followed by miserable conditions for pollination, led to a late ryegrass harvest with less-than-optimal yields. The perennial fell over the tall fescue crop, and the two varieties competed for seed cleaning facilities and state seed lab approval. With inventories tight, the inevitable happened, and the industry rolled into fall scrambling for new crop, trucks and trying to make customers happy.

Furthermore, fall 2012 experienced a drought of historical proportions in the Willamette Valley. Newly planted seed fields sat waiting for moisture, and the effectiveness of weed control measures was diminished. And when it rained, it didn’t stop.

“By mid-November it was painfully obvious that what we had was all we were going to get,” Rector says

Tubbs doesn’t foresee the perennial ryegrass market improving any time soon.

“NGF said 154 golf courses closed this past year,” he says. “There are fewer courses, fewer acres. This is not a fad, it’s a trend.”

John Walsh is a freelance writer based in Cleveland, Ohio.



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The Rodman Wanamaker Trophy at Oak Hill Country Club in Rochester, N.Y., the site of the 95th PGA Championship.



# PRIMED FOR THE PGA

Corcoran and crew have Oak Hill rough and ready for the 2013 PGA Championship

BY DAVID MCPHERSON

**O**ak Hill Country Club is no stranger to hosting Majors. Since it was founded in 1901, the 36-hole facility has hosted nearly every major golf tournament, including three U.S. Opens, a pair of PGA Championships, The Ryder Cup, and most recently the 2008 Senior PGA Championship.

And just as the course is used to hosting Majors, Jeff Corcoran, the club's savvy superintendent, is used to preparing for them. Now, Corcoran and his crew are ready for the world's best to put The East Course to the test when the prestigious private golf club in Rochester, N.Y.,

hosts yet another Major this August: The 95th PGA Championship.

"It will be interesting to see how it holds up 10 years later, as we didn't do a full-scale renovation coming into this tournament," Corcoran

*Continued on page 36*



“TRYING TO PEAK FOR THAT ONE WEEK IN AUGUST IS CERTAINLY THE KEY. HOWEVER, MOTHER NATURE IS THE BIGGEST VARIABLE THAT CAN THROW YOU A CURVEBALL ANYWHERE ALONG THE WAY.”

JEFF CORCORAN

No. 13, a 598-yard par 5, has never been reached in two. They expect that record to fall at the PGA Championship.



*Continued from page 35*

says about the last time the club hosted this event, when Shaun Micheel won it in a surprise victory.

No major course changes have occurred in the past five years, but there's been a lot of fine-tuning. For instance, new tees on 17 and 18 were constructed, and various bunkers on the course were modified. Some contours on the 5th and 6th greens were tweaked as well, and the 15th green was rebuilt. All those green changes were made to increase pinnable positions.

"We found, even during the 2008 Senior PGA Championship, those three greens were extremely challenging to find a good variety of hole locations," Corcoran says.

Those subtle changes give Kerry Haigh, chief championships officer of The PGA of America, the opportunity to have a lot more variety now when it comes to setting up the course each day.

"With the addition of more possible pin locations," Corcoran adds, "he can also bring the water into play as much, or as little, as he likes on these holes."

Beyond taking cues and guidance from the PGA of America, how is Corcoran, and his capable crew of 65-strong, making sure Oak Hill is in top agronomic shape for the year's final Major?

"What we do any given year on a day-to-day basis isn't that much different than what we are doing to prepare for this tournament," he explains. "Trying to peak for that one week in August is certainly the key. However, Mother Nature is the biggest variable that can throw you a curveball anywhere along the way. That is my biggest concern. It's also the one that is the furthest out of my control."

Corcoran was a little concerned that the course would have to weather the peak stress of the summer heat before the pros tee off August 5-11. Nonetheless, "in the last 10 years we have had floods, extreme heat, drought, etc.," he says. "We will handle anything that comes this year the same way we have done in the past."

While he can't control Mother Nature, Corcoran prays for no rain. He knows wet

conditions would make for the worst possible scenario and lead to lower scores. "That would let the pros throw darts out there and would be unfortunate," he says. "We want to challenge them."



Jeff Corcoran

### Roughing It

At a little over 7,000 yards, by modern standards, Oak Hill is not long in yardage. The defense of the timeless course is its tree-lined fairways and its gnarly rough, which the PGA of America has asked to be graduated.

"We are going to have a graduated rough that will be 14 feet outside the width of the fairways and roughly the same around the green surrounds," Corcoran reveals. "That

is really a challenge and a lot of extra labor ... it adds a whole new dimension to our mowing practices and the amount of bodies we have to use."

Corcoran interned at Oak Hill back in 1994, and other than the brief time he left to take a head superintendent job at Weston Golf Club outside of Boston, it's his most familiar golfing ground. Still, one wonders whether Corcoran feels any extra pressure this time around.

"I've been at Oak Hill for four major tournaments now," he concludes. "I feel like I have a pretty good knowledge of the property. If we don't make any mental mistakes, we will be in good shape; we can handle whatever is thrown at us. We know what we have to do and we will make sure we don't stray from that path."

David McPherson is a Toronto-based freelance writer and corporate communicator. Follow him on Twitter @aspen73.

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At a recent South Texas GCSA chapter meeting, Cook invited members to play in the golf outing. Here Cook (left) is pictured with John Freeman of Brookside Equipment; Debbie Burton, a member at Walden on Lake Houston; and Charles Joachim, CGCS.





**F**or 35 years I've been a superintendent, my longest time spent in Sacramento, Calif., where I worked for 16 years.

Currently, I'm enjoying working at Walden on Lake Houston in Humble, Texas. We're a part of the Century Golf family, which includes more than 60 golf courses.

At Century Golf, we recognize that we are in the membership business. It's our culture. We recognize it every day.

Everyone at our facility is expected to provide service that will develop a positive experience for our members. Yes, that includes the crew back at the maintenance shop, from the head superintendent to the guys operating string trimmers, trying to avoid getting hit with errant tee shots.

It can get a little tricky — maybe even confusing — to most of the grass growers out there. I thought my job was to cut the grass, water, fertilize and stay out of the way. Now you want me to speak to these members and be part of the front of the house? And management's answer was "yes."

So we decided to do what anyone who values his or her job would do — put on a new hat and make it happen. But wait a minute... how do we make this happen?

#### "T-BAM"

Century Golf stresses the saying "Thanks for being a member." We've shortened this to "T-BAM" when discussing it in-house.

How can my crew and I say thanks? I realize that language barriers can sometimes be a problem, so can slowing pace of play. So I came up with something that says "T-BAM" quickly, without



When the maintenance crew is asked to further an initiative, a forward-thinking superintendent steps up.

**BY BOB COOK, CTP**


a spoken word. I created a sticker to attach to all of our equipment and carts.

Employees can wave, and with a quick gesture point to the sticker. You would be surprised how many smiles and thumbs-up we get.

Let's carry this idea inside. How can we say "thanks" over and over? How about we put the same stickers up at the coffee station, the pro shop and even offer the members a sticker for their personal carts?

Each month all the Century Golf superintendents join a conference call at which time we share stories of "T-BAM" moments. A few examples would be playing golf with members, having lunch with a group, communication updates/blogs and speaking opportunities or special projects involving golfers and committees. I'd like to think that these stickers also have added to our effort to successfully make members feel welcomed and appreciated.

We have developed a culture where members invite friends to join the club. The gratification members feel comes from the service they receive everywhere from the parking lot to the end of the 18th.

We all know what membership can mean, whether it be in a church, club or anything else. It says that you're a part of a family. As this family grows, all of a sudden the club has a waiting list, the parking lot is full and you need a tee time to play. All this happens because the staff took the time to say "Thanks for being a member." 

Bob Cook, Certified Turfgrass Professional, is the superintendent at Walden on Lake Houston in Humble, Texas. Cook is happy to share his sticker with other courses. He can be reached via email at [bcook@waldencc.com](mailto:bcook@waldencc.com).



## Herbicide

Solitaire herbicide is now available in a 4-lb package. **FMC PROFESSIONAL SOLUTIONS**

still will make the 1-lb package available, but the new package can treat up to 4 acres and gives professionals more options for application. The post-emergence



solution can treat against sedges, crabgrass and broad-leaf weeds. Solitaire herbicide is labeled for control of more than 60 weeds, can provide visible results days after treatment and solves multiple weed problems.

[FMC.com](http://FMC.com)

## Hover trimmer

The Hover Trimmer, made by **AUTOLAWNMOW** of Ireland and distributed stateside by **SEAGO INTERNATIONAL**, is a blade

and hood attachment that will fit almost any brand string trimmer. The hover trimmer is a cross between a string trimmer and hover mower. Its hovering technology makes back pains and pulled muscles far less likely and makes the entire unit nearly weight-

less. It has applications for golf, landscape and homeowner markets. The

string trimmers cut smaller areas and mulch the clippings into smaller particles, leaving nothing behind to pick up. There are two sizes for the trimmer, the HT-300 that is designed for machines with a 30cc engine or larger and the HT-200, which is designed for 30cc and smaller trimmers.

[SeagoUSA.com](http://SeagoUSA.com)



## Trencher

**DITCH WITCH** has released the new RT30. The RT30 is a ride-on trencher with a compact footprint. The trencher is complete with four-wheel drive, a tight turning radius and maneuverability with 24.8 hp. Its vigorous motor allows it to handle some of the most difficult jobsite conditions. The trencher uses a larger shaft and bearings than smaller trenchers, resulting in less maintenance and greater productivity. Its maintenance-free pivot design allows it to keep above dirt and debris. The RT30 gives rental companies the opportunity to offer a product that is more powerful than a walk behind and more affordable than a standard size ride-on trencher.

[DitchWitch.com](http://DitchWitch.com)

## Water remover

The BowDry from **BOWCOM** is a walk-behind water-removing machine. The BowDry's rear collection area and transport wheels make it easy to maneuver even when full. The four-wheel chassis evenly distributes weight to clear water without impacting the con-

dition of the green, and the foam roller is turf friendly. It can drain greens and walking areas without making a sound. The BowDry also works for pool areas, locker rooms, baseball fields, tennis courts or walking paths.

[SeagoUSA.com](http://SeagoUSA.com)



## Battery

### **TROJAN BATTERY COMPANY**

has introduced the Traveler 8V longer life battery. The battery has 40 percent longer life than the current T-875 battery. The traveler 8V has been researched and developed for more than 4 years to perfect its internal design and external case improvements. The internal design of the battery



includes Trojan's new patent-pending Internal Battery Protection System. The IBP system features thicker grids, membrane-wrapped plates, Trojan's exclusive Maxguard T2 multi-rib separators and T2 Technology. The traveler 8V has stronger case walls, which make for improved element compression and increased durability.

[TrojanBattery.com](http://TrojanBattery.com)