



# Where Was Everybody?

By Monroe S. Miller

The 1998 edition of the Wisconsin Turfgrass Association Field Day was the best one in the history of this event. I know that because I haven't ever missed a Field Day.

I was reflecting on the Field Day and how much it has changed over the years, changing always to make it better and more accessible. The first one was held at the University of Wisconsin Ag Experiment Station at Arlington. It was tiny, with only a few exhibitors — Hanley and Wisconsin Turf and Reinders were there — and a small crowd, maybe 50. It was hot and humid and overcast, a typical Wisconsin mid- to late summer day. Dr. Robert Newman had some herbicide plots in one corner of the huge research farm, and the tour was transported by tractor and hayrack — it was a rough ride!

In the intervening years, we have met for Field Day at Camelot CC near Lomira, at Oconomowoc CC, at Yahara Hills golf course and at the West Madison Ag Research Station during the development of the O.J. Noer Facility. It always amazed me how much generosity has been extended on behalf of improving the level of competence of those of us producing turf in Wisconsin. Hosting meant more than giving up the practice range for day in the summer. Oh, it meant that for sure, but it also involved having UW-Madison staff develop demonstration plots that were meaningful and that would advance our understanding of the science. Patience and a real devotion to the business were required by those great people who invited us in during those years.

And how about the faculty during that time. Always in transition, always a rush to design and develop plot work that was educational and interesting, knowing that the next year or the one after that would see the Summer Field Day at a different site.

The weather has been surprisingly good. It poured rain one year at Camelot, it was hotter than blazes (and equally humid) some years, but for most Field Days the temperatures were normal, low 80s and comfortable like it was this year.

Through the early years, the event was darn well attended, given all the circumstances. It was only natural to expect that when the Noer Facility matured the crowds would explode in numbers. That is what was hoped for - to reach as many colleagues as possible.

Sad thing is, that hasn't happened, not at least for golf course superintendents. Lawn care, landscape maintenance and sod producers have increased their numbers by a greater percentage than our group has. I cannot figure out why.

The WTA has tried a lot of different things, including the aforementioned location changes. We've tried the two-day Field Day; that didn't help. We have moved the date around. The thinking was that the third Wednesday in August was a good time. But there was a suggestion to move it up, so this year the event convened on the second Wednesday of August. That didn't help. A lot of the same guys still were not there.

You can argue there was some tough weather around Wisconsin a week or two before the Field Day. But many years that is the case; I don't believe that has much to do with it, except in a few cases.

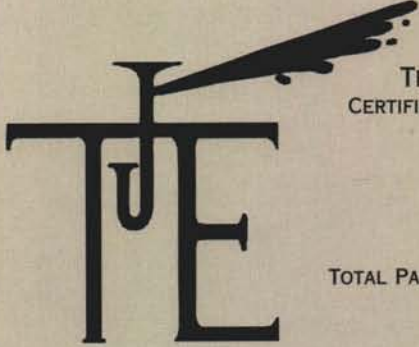
The WTA has worked on the number of mailings and their timing. We have sent announcements out across the state with sales people, and printed notification in state and national journals. Yet the attendance remains mostly static.

Great food is always available at Field Day. We have had celebrities come for a few hours, hoping to encourage attendance. Golf has been made available at various times. Yet the attendance remains mostly static.

Ray Knapp and I were visiting about this issue a few weeks after Field Day. He said some superintendents think the Field Day should be in mid-July! Why even have one if that is when it is scheduled? There would be no disease research developed in most years, lesser results from fertility treatments (which include timing as a variable often times), full impact of various herbicides and PGRs wouldn't be apparent. And so on. A date in July makes less than no sense; it would be a waste of time.

It is too bad more don't see the value of a day at the Noer Facility, value that justifies a day away from the golf course. This year was just sensational. The place was immaculate, the day couldn't have been better, the field research was extensive and could have occupied all your time during the day, and the camaraderie was unbeatable.

I don't have an answer to my own question, 'Where Was Everybody?' But I am among those that would like to find out what we are missing here. If you are one of those who doesn't attend, help us out. Give us some suggestions, or at least tell us why you think we seem to have hit the attendance ceiling. It is too valuable an experience to let pass without a maximum effort to getting the majority of the WGCSA members there. 🍷



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