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FAIRWAY MANAGEMENT

The Wisconsin Survey

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If I asked you to make a list that ranked the aspects of golf course management that have changed the most in recent years, what would be at the top of your list?

Chances are pretty good that fairway management would be at the top of your list and the lists of your fellow Wisconsin golf course superintendents. That should not surprise any of us given the ongoing evolution of fairway management techniques that are now approaching those of putting green management. I'm sure you know what I mean; mowing with lightweight triplex and fiveplex units, harvesting clippings, aerifying with machines designed for putting greens, applying pesticides on preventative, bi-weekly schedules, irrigating with computer controlled, double row irrigation systems and so on.

Given this state of flux in fairway management and the heavy price tag today's technologies carry, it is crucial for golf course superintendents to make prudent choices when planning their fairway management programs. When making any tough decision, it is always best to have as much information about the problem as possible. In the case of fairway management decisions, it would be very beneficial to find out what equipment and techniques have worked for other superintendents before we finalize our own decisions. From my experience with the putting green management articles I wrote for *The Grass Roots* in the summer of 1989, I knew that if given the opportunity, golf course superintendents in Wisconsin would be more than willing to share their successes and failures in fairway management with their peers.

I decided to provide that opportunity by writing this article which is based on the results of fairway management surveys I sent to a wide cross-section of WGCSA members. I received 25 survey responses from superintendents who manage golf courses that range from a private country club in Milwaukee to a daily fee resort in northern Wisconsin. It is my hope that this diversity among the survey respondents will yield an article that is helpful to all superintendents,

no matter what level of fairway management they currently employ.

Topics covered in the survey include:

Background Information	Wetting Agents
Fertilization Programs	Spraying Equipment
Mowing Equipment	<i>Poa annua</i> Control
Irrigation Systems	Aerification
Pesticide Applications	Overseeding
Snowmold Control	Additional Topics

My first casual glance through the surveys revealed the expected differences between the management of bentgrass/*Poa annua* fairways and bluegrass fairways. Of the 25 survey respondents, 20 manage the former and 5 manage the latter. The dominance of bentgrass/*Poa annua* fairway management is a function of who I chose to receive the survey. I intentionally sent out the surveys in a 4 to 1 ratio of bentgrass/*Poa annua* to bluegrass. This is not intended to diminish the task of those superintendents who manage bluegrass fairways. Rather, it is a simple affirmation that management of bentgrass/*Poa annua* fairways is more technical, the margin for error is smaller and changes occur more rapidly than in bluegrass fairway management. Thus my discussion will focus on the management of bentgrass/*Poa annua* fairways, but will include information about bluegrass fairway management when warranted.

Before beginning a comparison of fairway management programs, it is necessary to first identify the background conditions under which those programs are administered. In this survey, the background conditions polled include: turfgrass population, soil type, soil pH, age of the fairways and fairway acreage.

Not surprisingly, the most dominant background condition is turfgrass population; or the ratio of bentgrass/*Poa annua*/bluegrass. Analysis of the surveys reveals differences in many management programs based on the four turfgrass population categories that are listed in Table 1.

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