

Future Shock — Are You Preparing for 1984?

(Continued from last month's issue)

It does not take much foresight to realize that the future is going to be demanding and challenging for the members of the turfgrass industry. Rightly or wrongly, the turfgrass industry has always been somehow assigned to the position of being a luxury industry. One cannot argue that feeding mankind is agriculture's most important task. However, the importance of the turfgrass industry in providing recreation and beautiful landscapes for the mental well-being of the American people cannot be denied. It is important that those of us involved in today's turfgrass industry not become complacent with the progress and accomplishments we have inherited from our predecessors. We must realize that there are very important challenges lying before us.

It is very likely that some of the aforementioned issues will lead us to find that in the future, new golf courses will be built on poorer and poorer land, and the prime agricultural lands will be preserved, through federal land use laws, for agricultural production of food. It is reasonable to assume that as prime land becomes increasingly valuable the length of golf courses will decrease. Wherever possible we should begin to think in terms of utilizing golf courses for alternative uses. Several recreational functions are compatible with the game of golf. The construction of bike paths, picnic

areas, camping facilities, hiking trails and the production of limited food on areas adjacent to and within the golf course would increase the functional use of golf course land.

Certain Environmental Protection Agency restrictions for clearance of pesticides for use in agriculture are rapidly increasing the cost of producing and marketing pesticides. In the future we will find that very little pesticide development will be allocated to pesticides used specifically on turf. The economic potential is so limited when compared to the investment cost that few companies, if any, will be willing to take the risk of developing a pesticide specifically for turf. The increased cost of chemical production coupled with the fact that most chemicals are oil-based derivatives will force increased emphasis on breeding programs for resistance as well as research in bacterial and viral biological control systems. It is estimated that there are about one billion pounds of pesticides applied per year in the U.S. It is not out of the realm of reasoning for one to assume that somewhere in the future we will have to report where we applied these chemicals and how much we applied.

Energy conservation is going to be a very real consideration on golf courses of the future. The turf industry will not be influenced as dramatically as other industries by energy conservation programs as currently only 2 to 4% of the golf course budget is allocated to fuel costs. As energy conservation programs evolve, we can expect higher gasoline taxes, excise taxes and tighter building codes to impose energy conservation. We may have observed the temporary end of the "Suburban Sprawl" for the time being.

Water remains one of the largest factors limiting man's ability to produce agricultural crops. It is likely that we will see increased use of reclaimed water and waste-water irrigation. The use of liquid and solid sludges will soon be a matter of course in larger metropolitan areas. As one contemplates the depletion of natural gas reserves and couples this with the importance of natural gas production in fertilizer, it becomes obvious that alternative nitrogen sources may be very desirable in the future. In our continuing attempt to conserve energy it is likely that we will find an increasing interest and economic justification for the use

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of chemical growth inhibitors.

The challenge to the turfgrass industry is clear. The thread of leadership that has passed throughout the history of golf and exists today must reject the concept of personal irresponsibility and the idea that self gratification is the highest ideal. We must begin pulling together in our attempt to meet the challenge. The Nielson Survey indicating a 3% decline in the number of golfers from 1973 to 1976 should be considered with all seriousness as this might well portend the beginning of a decline in interest in the game of golf. Looking back in history and realizing that the game of golf has been the driving force for the turfgrass industry, one must be concerned about this decline and how it might relate to the general well being of the entire turfgrass industry. It is important to determine why there is a decreased interest in the game of golf. It is highly probable that the cost of playing the game of golf is surpassing the ability to pay for many Americans. Related to this increased cost is our increasing mania for manicured golf courses that are little more than billiard tables with trees and mounds. This was never how the game of golf was designed to be played, and it is not the way masses of people will ever be able to afford to play the game of golf.

There is no doubt that the best interests of the turfgrass industry lie in attempting to have golf become

the "common man's" game. To do this it is essential that the golf course superintendent do everything in his power to reduce the cost of maintaining the golf course. Maintenance costs on the golf course must, in the end, be transferred to the golfer. And if maintenance costs continue to rise in the face of every crisis, the cost of playing the game of golf will increase in direct proportion. Each year that it costs more to maintain a golf course, the game of golf is taken out of the economic reach of another "common man". There will always be the need for the exclusive country clubs, but if the turfgrass industry as we know it today is to continue to exist in the face of increasing maintenance costs and recurring food, energy and population crises, it is essential that we do everything possible to bring the game of golf within the reach of the "common man". If we cannot meet this challenge we may well observe the game of golf becoming a game for the "Captains of Industry" and the rich, much as it was in the late 1920's and early 1930's. This would be disastrous for the turf industry as we know it today.

To achieve all that is possible
We must attempt the impossible.
To be as much as we can be
We must dream of being more.

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