

FUTURE NEEDS OF THE SOD PRODUCTION INDUSTRY

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Needing a crystal ball to look ahead, the only ball available seemed to be that in a ball point pen. Obviously it is quite small, sometimes hard to read, and filled with uncertainty.

Nevertheless, as an educator and one who has worked for and observed much progress in the sod industry, the ball point pen seems to indicate:

1. Exactness in seed quality --

Certainly with some seed houses now carrying ten varieties of bluegrasses, the seedsman is willing to sell anything. Obviously, and in practice, he has tried to sell the best to the sod growers. What variety? - it will change. What germ plasm? - it will blend. What special qualities? - disease resistance rather high. Poa annua freedom has come about in many cases because the sod grower demanded it.

2. Finnicky in seed purchase--

A little difference in lines of supply, a little premium in purity, a little more personal service may attach or disengage a customer from a supplier. The seed supplier can run way ahead of the consuming public. The sod grower is caught in between. Special specifications, special blends, special requirements may plague the seed handler, challenge the seed producer, and much confuse the seed salesman, but these will persist, or so the crystal ball seems to indicate.

3. Fickle in variety usage--

Just one report that cultivar X had disease A many send it sprawling. One private hope in an Experiment Station report can boom the demand for new seed. The TV ad, the advertisements in the trade magazines, the colored brochures, the personal service - there will be little loyalty. The long term loyalty so expressed to Merion will probably not survive again. Even seed producing companies will be itchy to change varieties and willing to respond to pressures. Positive statements that help the seedsmen clear out old varieties, or to go on trying to promote second best may really help the sod growers.

4. Efficient in Production Techniques --

The crystal ball can be very cloudy, but this would still be evident - look what has already been accomplished. Just think back to the days of hand-labor, hand-loading and hand-unloading - but tomorrow will be different also. The reduction in winterkill, better drainage of land, specific control of weeds, improved mechanism must continue.

5. Willingness to use Vegetative Increase --

When Ben Warren reported he had blended 1,000 acres vegetatively over the years it became significant, and there will be more research on vegetative usage. It shortens the line from research to sod grower by about four years, and about four big problems, including all the seed field phases. So, be alert to vegetative usage. It will be more rather than less in proportion.

6. Systems Research Needed --

How very creative the sod cutting machines have been! Everybody got into the act and a few have survived. The real need now is for a sod laying machine. When it comes it will double the market for sod. Equally important it will give the sod industry control of the package finally achieved as sod growing on the new place.

Over the years the landscape person has had to supply labor and hands because that was his business. Now he has less of this business available, so a sod laying machine is the next breakthrough. When it comes it will affect the sod handling and sod cutting for it will be a total system. When it comes, that method of packaging to match a man's back (1 square yard) will be passe, and what has been dreamed of will be obsolete. It will be worth changes, including chain marketing, and there will be many problems tomorrow. The ball point pen expects that, but looking at the crystal ball, one must see the reflection of a tremendously aggressive and progressive industry. Having achieved a spectacular success and well qualified to move ahead, the ball point pen serves as a crystal ball looking to the future with anticipation.