

Turfgrass Education Initiative to Help Rural Communities

JULY 29, 2011. Safe school grounds and high-quality municipal sports fields maintained without traditional pesticides are the focus of a new University of Guelph-based initiative. The Turfgrass Outreach Project (TOP) supports rural groundskeepers across southern Ontario, providing workshops, training programs and an online knowledge centre.



The project is run by scientists and educators from the Guelph Turfgrass Institute and is supported by the Knowledge Translation and Transfer program, a new initiative under the University's partnership agreement with the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs

(OMAFRA). That program funds projects that turn research knowledge into use in the agricultural, food and rural sectors.

Without cosmetic pesticides (banned since 2009), rural groundskeepers have had to make major changes to manage school and municipal sports fields. But so far, public outreach has focused on the impacts on residential lawns and urban sports fields. This project is looking to address rural sports fields, said Eric Lyons, a professor of plant agriculture and TOP project manager.

"Urban areas have often had municipal restrictions in place for a while, but in many cases, rural communities have had to adapt very quickly to managing turf without cosmetic pesticides," Lyons said. "The education and outreach to deal with that just isn't in place in rural communities like it has been in urban centres."

In response, TOP is pulling expertise from the Guelph Turfgrass Institute, U of G's Ontario Agricultural College and its School of Environmental Design and Rural Development, and OMAFRA to create accessible educational opportunities for rural groundskeepers. It's also partnered with the Sports Turf Association.

"We welcome the chance to learn more about the specific challenges faced by rural schools and municipalities," said Nicole Markwick, TOP's project co-ordinator. "For example, the safety of sports fields is important because they are used year-round for various sports and events that impact rural communities economically, socially and environmentally."

TOP also aims to foster stronger networks for continuing education on sustainable resource management for rural turfgrass managers. It has also partnered with community organizations. More information about the Turfgrass Outreach Project is available online at www.uoguelph.ca/turfgrassoutreach. You can also contact Nicole Markwick at 519-824-4120, Ext. 52251, turfgrassoutreach@uoguelph.ca.



Sports Turf Association's

Sports Turf Management and Maintenance Course

1/3 required courses for the Parks & Open Space Professional Training Program (Level 1)

April 30 to May 3, 2012

University of Guelph

For more information: 519-763-9431

www.sportsturfassociation.com/POSA/Prof Training Program