



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Should costs be included?

Turf Grass Trends is super! I thoroughly enjoyed your premier issue. It fills a niche not addressed by current publications.

What's particularly amazing is the almost complete absence of errors or mistakes. However, I did stumble across one. In his excellent article on Pythium diseases, Dr. Nelson does a great job of explaining Pythium root rot. Unfortunately, there is an error on Page 4 regarding the relative cost of Pythium control products. Alette fungicide is considerably more expensive than indicated. Using a \$12 per lb. retail price, Alette's actual cost per thousand is \$3.00 and \$6.00 at 4 + 8 oz. rate, respectively.

You may want to clarify this with Dr. Nelson and Rhone-Poulenc (the manufacturer of Alette); I'm confident they are interested in an accurate portrayal. In the future, you may want to discourage cost comparisons since it is almost impossible to make accurate comparisons based on suggested list prices, special promotions, local availability, etc.

Again, congratulations on a successful first issue and good luck!

— L. DOUGLAS HOUSEWORTH, PH.D.
Man. Tech. Support, Turf & Ornamental Dept.
CIBA-GEIGY, Greensboro, North Carolina

We appreciate the encouragement and the correction. You are right about the costs of applying Alette.

Despite all the variables involved in the real world prices that end users pay for products, we believe that a comparison of the costs is essential. After all, costs are a major factor—especially since a lawncare operator may not be able to charge enough for an application to warrant using a more expensive material—regardless of its potential benefits. These price indicators are simply that—indicators of the approximate price range.

However, given the variables you noted, in the future, we will include a disclaimer (see chart page 3).

Drift agent is available

Let me congratulate you on what appears to be an informative and useful product.

In your On the Horizon column, you spoke of drift control agents. Please note that Rockland Corp. has been selling Rockland Target Drift Retardant for the last two years. This is a highly concentrated drift and mist retardant that can be added directly to spray mixes.

— ROBERT K. WITTPENN
Rockland Corporation
West Caldwell, NJ

The diagnostic art

by Christopher Sann

DESPITE ALL THE SCIENTIFIC technicalities involved in diagnosing turf problems, like virtually every other specialized form of problem-solving, it ultimately is an art. Sure, it requires skills that are gained by trial and error, which is the basis of science. It also requires a healthy dose of curiosity, which motivates our willingness to go through trials and errors in the hope of gaining new knowledge. However, being good at diagnosing turf problems also requires certain personality traits or habits of thought that have more to do with art than science or technology.



These traits may boil down simply to being a person who likes growing things, and taking care of them. What's the reward? When things go right, we see beauty. That is what a healthy, well-maintained stand of turf is—a thing of beauty. Many people in the field probably don't recognize the artist in themselves, but this artistic aspect of turf management is what drives our desire to do better, to achieve a higher level of quality—to manage to make the green spaces we care for more beautiful.

Developing a diagnostic sense should involve a system of financial as well as psychological rewards, but the essence of craftsmanship is that it helps us to feel good about ourselves and what we do—even if the financial rewards aren't always what they should be. When an area responds to what you have done to it, seeing how beautiful it looks provides an on-the-spot reward that is every bit as essential as the technical know-how involved.

Honest evaluation requires both the courage of convictions—the ability to make decisions—and the humility required to recognize when those convictions and decisions didn't work.

The actual process of diagnosis starts with a keen sense of observation and a willingness to search and research for relevant information. Formulating action plans—deciding what the problem is and what you are going to do to correct it—combines these first two activities. As anyone who has tried knows, applying book knowledge amid the complexities of the field isn't a simple process.

Carrying out your plans is relatively straight-forward, but it too has to be done with care. "Measure twice, cut once"

is an expression that carpenters use to make this same point.

The next step is evaluating the results of those actions. Let's face it—learning from your mistakes is not as easy as it sounds. Evaluation takes patience. You have to develop a sense for how long to wait and see—how long to give the action you took before you do something else.

Honest evaluation requires both the courage of convictions—the ability to make decisions—and the humility required to recognize when those convictions and decisions didn't work. Even scientists, who work by conducting experiments and drawing conclusions from the results, frequently have difficulty admitting their errors. The process can take generations. The diagnostic art is not something that can be handed down wholesale from one individual to another—especially given today's rate of change. Today's latest discovery may become tomorrow's discarded fallacy. That's why keeping up—continuing education—is important in virtually every field of endeavor.

Classroom learning can help. Books or magazines—or newsletters like this one—can help. But diagnosing complex diseases in the field—where the full array of environmental and site-specific factors and co-factors are at play—takes something more than second-hand knowledge, however accurate or insightful it may be. After all, the field is where many a theory has been disproved, many a product has failed to produce the sought-after result, and many decisions have to be made right now—no matter how little or how much we think we know about turf management.

So diagnosing turf problems takes a personal awareness of what is going on around you. Doing it well takes digging, probing, smelling, feeling, reading, and getting your hands and your knees dirty. You have to be willing to ask questions and—somehow—know when to accept the conventional wisdom and when to reject it in favor of your own gut feeling.

As with all skills, some people are better at it than others. Diagnosing problems is a skill that grows through personal experience. It can be aided by the growing body of knowledge about turf and its ecology, but nothing can replace it. ■

Turf Grass TRENDS



Turf Grass Trends is published monthly by the Turf Information Group, Inc.
2070 Naamans Rd., Suite 110, Wilmington, DE 19810-2644
(302) 475-8450

Christopher Sann *Executive Editor*
Dr. Eric Nelson *Associate Editor*
Russ McKinney *Managing Editor*
Connie Wright McKinney *Art Director*
Jan Tunell *Business Manager*

For credit card subscription information only, call 1-800-645-8873. Subscriptions are \$120 per year for a single subscription and \$100 per year for multiple subscriptions. *Turf Grass Trends* accepts no advertisements. Unsolicited manuscripts are not accepted. © 1992 Turf Information Group, Inc.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Please write to address above and include a return address. As space allows, we will respond to the letters we publish. We reserve the right to edit all letters. All published letters become the property of *Turf Grass Trends*.

REGULATORY WATCH



Federal legislation tops summer regulatory agenda

TWO IMPORTANT, RELATED PIECES of legislation are working their way through the Congressional committee process this summer: the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA) and the Pesticide Safety Improvement Act (HR3742).

FIFRA, which includes rules governing certification and training, is up for re-authorization. The key features of the Pesticide Safety Improvement Act include:

- REQUIRING MORE TRAINING for commercial pesticide applicators
- INCREASING FINES FOR VIOLATIONS
- PRE-EMPTYING OF LOCAL PESTICIDE USE regulations with state and federal rules.

The law would also require training of state enforcement personnel.

Both bills have the support of the Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA). In testimony before the sub-committee on Department Operations Research and Foreign Agriculture (DORFA), PLCAA supported increased training requirements; customer right-to-know, notification of application, and customer service agreement rules; and national regulation of the lawn care industry. It opposed increased fines, which would be raised from \$5,000 to \$25,000 by the currently proposed version of HR3742.

Right to know regulations are currently administered under the Emergency Planning and Community Right to Know Act, which primarily focuses on the storage of toxic chemicals, and PLCAA testified that FIFRA is a more suitable place for these regulations. Right-to-know and related rules are particularly important to the lawn care industry, because of its visibility—to both customers and neighboring non-customers.

For additional information, or to add your voice to lobbying efforts, regarding these bills, contact your U.S. Representative's office. ■

ASK THE EXPERT

HAVE A QUESTION on any aspect of turf management? Send it to: Ask the Expert, *Turf Grass Trends*, 2070 Naamans Rd., Suite 110, Wilmington DE 19810-2644 or fax it to (302) 475-8450. If we can't answer your question, we will put it to the best available expert on the subject.