

Cal Poly Turfgrass Management Update

By Terry L. Vassey

I can't believe that a year has come and gone since my family and I left Tennessee on our four-day journey across the country to the central coast of California and Cal Poly. And what a place to drop anchor—beautiful Mediterranean climate, close to the ocean, great people and a wonderful University. Really, a dream has come true for us.

I have to also say what a great year it has been. I have met so many enthusiastic people and have visited so many wonderful places that I can not remember it all. I have been so busy, that the year has literally flown by.

We (the students and I) have not been idle here either. We have gotten so many things accomplished at Cal Poly and, with your continued help, we have plans for a great deal more.

Let me provide a short list of the things we have going as of this summer. First, we have completely redone the turfgrass demonstration plots/facility—changing from large blocks of a single species cultivar to many small plots of different cultivars. For instance, we now have 12 different cultivars of tall fescue and not just one as was the case before. We have done this for each of both the cool and warm season turfgrass types.

We have also stepped up the maintenance program for our 10,000 sq. ft. bent grass green and its quality has improved greatly. As a matter of fact the Cal Poly golf coach feels it is good enough now that he would like to set up a schedule for his players to start using it for practice. [As a side note - the University has obtained funds to build a genuine short game practice facility for the team of which the turf students will be involved in the construction and maintenance!]

Second, we have taken a weed blighted area west of the turfgrass plots and have turned it into a nine-hole putting course, a lawn entry feature and a tall grass prairie. The putting course consists of three bermuda greens, three sea shore paspalum greens, and one each of a fine fescue, Poa, and bentgrass green for the last three. Our goal will be to maintain these at ~0.150" and provide a novelty area for the students to enjoy as well as learn.

Around the greens we are planting tall ornamental grasses native to the five Mediterranean zones of the world. These will be identified with signage and will be consistent with the theme set by the Cal Poly Arboretum adjacent to the north and with the efforts of Audubon International, an organization I have been involved with from their start going back to my efforts with the Standard Club of Atlanta and Carolina National in coastal North Carolina.

As regards to research, I have now brought on board three graduate students to manage the funded projects already underway. One project is designed to identify better tall fescue cultivars for central California, another to examine the compatibility of buffalograss and fine fescue grown together as a home/commercial lawn mixture, and third, a project to evaluate optimum cutting strategies for many of the tall grasses used on golf courses as part of their wildlife habitat projects (we are still in need of funding for the last project.)

I am also very interested in developing projects related to sub-surface irrigation strategies for turfgrass slopes and in management practices for high quality kikuyugrass turf. These areas of study are also in need of funding.

In summary, I think it is easy to see we have been very busy my first year. I believe we are on the right track and that many of the students are already seeing the benefits of getting involved. Our goal is to continue moving the program forward making Cal Poly a respected member of the academic turfgrass community both here in California and the Nation as a whole. I hope all of the readers will agree and continue to support our efforts.

With that said, I would like to also take the opportunity now to personally thank many of those who have been so helpful to me, the students and to the University. Without their help, much of what we have done would not have been possible.

Specifically, and in no significant order, I would like to share the names of those that have contributed above the call as relates contributing to my cause. The list is long and some may not be remembered here—to them I apologize.

First, to Gordon Vosti, Michael Sommer (with wife Anitra), Rich Records, and Bob Schneiderhan my words do not go far enough to express my appreciation for what they have done in my first year. They have been there for me not only as industry professionals but as new found friends as well. They have contributed greatly to me.

As an example, Target Specialty Products, with the encouragement from Rich, graciously donated \$10,000 to fund as close to a full time technician for me at the turfgrass facility as possible. Having a person there almost full time has advanced the quality of the facility many fold. With continued and additional support, it will only get better, as maybe we can turn this into a permanent fulltime technician's position.

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Additionally a special thanks goes out to all of those that made my students and me so welcome as we toured the various industry sites this year. People like Bob and Jean Goodrich – Central Coast Sod, Lynda Wightman and her colleagues at Hunter Irrigation, Steve Wightman – QUALCOMM Stadium, Mike Tarantino - Poway School District, Bryan Foster - West Coast Sod (who donated much sod to our cause), Frank Wong and his staff – UC-Riverside, Jorge Morales - Alta Vista GC, Bruce Williams and his staff - LA Country Club, Will Schnell – The Rose Bowl, all those at Delta Bluegrass Sod, Brandon Morgan - Big League Dreams, Dave Barlow - Simplot, John Lohman and all of his associates - Valley Crest, Ed Ott - Colony Landscapes, Manny Sousa, Brad Coleman, and Billy Hausch - all managers on “The Peninsula”, Scott MacVicar - SF Giants, Tim Powers - Crystal Springs GC, and Mike McCullough – NCGA. Without their help I would not have heard/read things like “this was the best class I have taken at Cal Poly”, as one of the students wrote in their evaluation of one of my classes.

As I said, these represent only a fraction of the people I have met my first year. To all the others, I say “Thank You”. Know that you have made a Southerner feel most welcome far far away from home.

To close and to in essence stick my hand out some more, I would like to be so bold as to list some items that would contribute greatly to the efforts here and to “Learn by Doing” as is the motto so proudly held at Cal Poly. If you can help or know of someone else who might, please let me know. No contribution will be overlooked and we may be able to fix anything that is not in good repair. These are not listed in any order of importance as they are all necessary to us.

- Bunker machine w/ spiking attachment
- Triplex greens mower with tee and verticutter reels
- Walk behind blower
- Greens roller
- Trim mowing unit
- Topdresser (walk or pull behind)
- Greens aerator with multiple tine types
- New (second) storage building
- Toro 500 walk behind greens mower (to mow the putting course)
- Turfgrass utility vehicle

Finally, we can provide a gift-in-kind document that will allow contributors to obtain a tax credit for their gift.

Again, let me thank everyone for a great year. I am so grateful to be here and I know this will become the premier program it should be. Along with the other outstanding universities in this state we hope to advance the cause of turfgrass management throughout California. You can help by staying involved with us and continuing your support the University, the program and the students at Cal Poly State University, San Luis Obispo.

Lastly, if you are an alumnus of Cal Poly - SLO, please send me your name and particulars. I am trying to start a CP Turfgrass alumni association and want to get you back home and involved with Cal Poly again. Also, look for the new golf and tee shirts, hats and wind jackets soon to be available this fall.

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