

UPDATE

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Sports Field
Managers Association of New Jersey



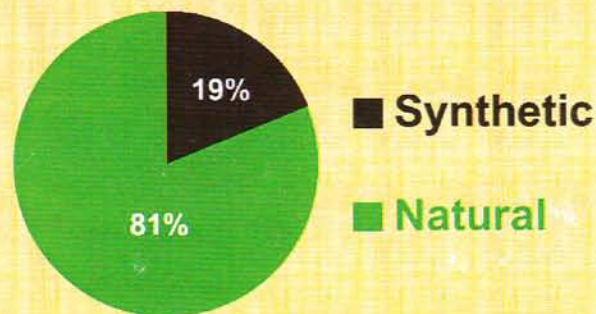
WHAT DO LACROSSE PARENTS THINK ABOUT SPORTS FIELDS?

BY: Brad Park and Dr. John Grande

Do lacrosse parents have opinions about the playing surfaces on which their sons and daughters compete? A survey developed in cooperation with the Rutgers University Snyder Research & Extension Farm, Pittstown, NJ determined lacrosse parent stakeholders' views on issues including field quality expectations, pesticide applications, increased budgeting for sports field improvement, and synthetic infill fields.

In late summer 2007, the Rutgers Snyder Research & Extension Farm established seven acres of a tall fescue and Kentucky bluegrass turf for the purpose of demonstrating how farming principles can be used to

WOULD YOU PREFER TO SEE YOUR CHILD PLAY ON A SYNTHETIC OR NATURAL TURF PLAYING SURFACE?*



*Survey conducted at Rutgers Snyder Research & Extension Farm lacrosse event on July 10, 2008; 47 lacrosse parents answered this question.

At a summer 2008 lacrosse event held at the Rutgers Snyder Research & Extension Farm, parent stakeholders were asked their opinions on a range of sports field issues, including synthetic turf.

develop "utility" sports fields. In many rural and suburban areas of New Jersey where land selection is still feasible, "utility" sports fields can potentially be developed on land that is naturally suited for sports fields - and subsequently reduce the high cost of major construction activity.

These principles included first choosing a naturally crowned site with good quality agricultural soils that did not require extensive earthmoving as part of the site preparation process and had adequate internal drainage and moderate rock issues. Lime and pre-plant fertilizers were applied based on soil test results and incorporated using a disc harrow.

A land leveler was then used to create a

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Lacrosse students enjoyed seven acres of tall fescue turf at the Rutgers Snyder Research & Extension Farm in July 2008. The turfgrass was established for the purpose of demonstrating how "utility" sports fields can be constructed using farming principles.

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smooth surface, followed by rock picking. Final seedbed preparation was completed using a roller harrow. A Brillion Seeder was calibrated to deliver 350 lbs of seed per acre and following natural rainfall, seedling emergence was evident 13 days after seeding. Equipment, supply and labor costs were documented throughout the project.

Although in many cases necessary, sports fields are often constructed on sites that require extensive earthmoving. The result is costly engineering designs and extensive topsoil disturbance. In these cases, heavy road construction equipment is often used during construction and ultimately over compacts the soil compromising turfgrass establishment and future management.

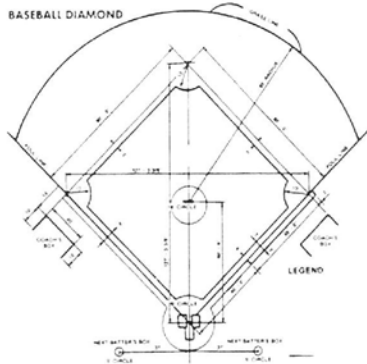
After the successful establishment of the fields, the Rutgers Snyder Research & Extension Farm hosted a lacrosse event in July 2008 to showcase the new fields to the public as well as demonstrate field development and construction using the farming principles described above. The event brought several hundred

lacrosse parents and players to Hunterdon County, NJ and players were able to use the fields for practices and scrimmages. The parents and coaches, as stakeholder groups, were presented information regarding project details.

A survey issued to the parents of players revealed their various opinions regarding sports fields – and the high bar they have set for field conditions. When parents (sixty-three responding) were asked what playing surface conditions they deemed to be minimally acceptable, 69% indicated either uniform turfgrass cover throughout the field with no bare soil or voids in the turf OR good turf cover throughout the field and thin turfgrass cover in front of goals. Only 25% thought that moderate turf cover throughout the field and bare soil in front of goal mouths and penalty kick areas was acceptable. These conditions are very common on Board of Education and Municipal fields in New Jersey. Interestingly, of the 69% of parents that found thin turf cover in front of goal mouths OR no voids in the turf minimally acceptable, 28% of those parents would not support the use of a herbicide on the sports field where

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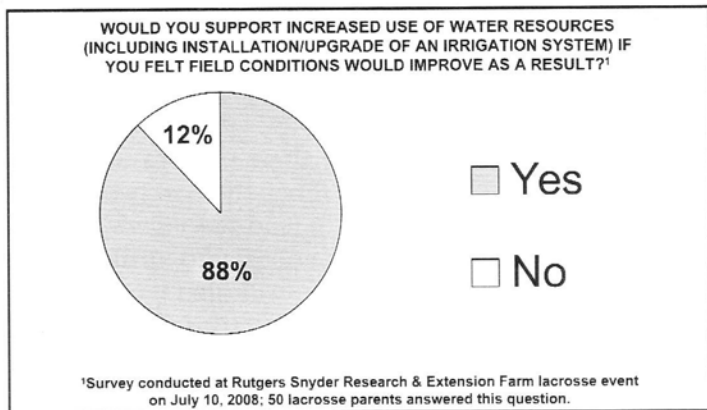
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their child plays – even if the application resulted in fewer bare areas resulting from dead annual weeds.



The importance of water resources to sports field performance was recognized by lacrosse parent stakeholders who answered a survey at a summer 2008 lacrosse event sponsored by the Rutgers Snyder Research & Extension Farm.

Parents did express a high level of support for increased expenditures for improvement of natural turf fields. When asked whether they would support increased budgeting for seed, equipment, and personnel if it meant field conditions could improve with fewer pesticide inputs, 75% of fifty-one parents responding answered "Yes." Similarly, 88% of parents (50 responding) supported increased use of water resources (including the installation /upgrade of an irrigation system) if field conditions would improve as a result.

In the midst of significant media attention towards human health and synthetic infill sports fields in summer 2008, parents were asked about their opinion of synthetic infill fields. Question 9 of the survey stated, "What is your general feeling regarding synthetic infill surfaces (i.e. tire rubber or tire rubber + sand-filled playing surfaces)?" Forty-five parents responded to this question and 35% answered, "Synthetics provide an all-weather, uniform playing surface compared to natural surfaces and are a worthwhile expenditure." Thirty-eight percent (38%) chose, "Although costly and human health questions remain, synthetics provide a benefit to youth athletics program." The

remaining 27% of those responding voiced concern over synthetic installations by selecting, "The human health questions and costs outweigh any potential benefits of synthetic turf fields."

When the question was posed, "Would you prefer to see your child play on a synthetic or natural turf playing surface?" 81% of the forty-seven parents answering chose natural surfaces over synthetic.

These results provide a look into the minds of parents whose children play on the surfaces overseen by sports field managers. While there still appears to be a strong preference for natural grass, the expectation for playing surface quality is high.

The authors would like to thank JoAnn Stevely and the Rutgers Snyder Research & Extension Farm staff for their hard work in administering the survey.

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