

WTT Survey Shows Sod Industry Headed for Vast Expansion, Increased Sales

America's sod growing industry stands at the foot of a giant ladder which leads to new levels of expansion. This is the consensus of state agriculture departments, sod growers' associations, and many individuals engaged in the burgeoning professional turf business.

Prior to the introduction of the monthly Sod Industry Section in July, *Weeds Trees and Turf* instituted an extensive preliminary survey of sod growers to determine the extent of their operations, as well as their needs and plans. Research into all 50 states turned up a vast spectrum of information—much of it diverse and even contradictory. But the survey did point out some definite trends in the sod growers' community. And it helped WTT begin a deeper, more probing investigation of the sod industry, an investigation currently underway which will, eventually, report the details and scope of the heretofore virtually unexplored sod business.

If nothing else, the initial sur-

vey proved that many industry members really know little of the extent of American sod production. Many state agencies tend to underestimate their own state's sod production, claiming that much of the sod used in that state originates elsewhere. For example, one Wyoming extension agent claims that "There has been an increase in the past three years of sod shipped in from Colorado, Nebraska, and South Dakota." Yet an official of the South Dakota Department of Agriculture reports, "There are no commercial sod producers in the state."

Communications Lacking

This seeming contradiction does not really imply controversy between the states. It reflects, instead, the general lack of communications and information within the sod industry, a relatively common occurrence.

Few states require certification of sod growers, so there is often no official source of data. Since today there are only a limited

number of large sod producing companies in any one state, there are few state sod growers' associations. Even state or regional turf associations do not have complete information about sod growers among their membership.

Does all this mean, then, that America's sod industry is in a disorganized and rudimentary shambles? Not at all. It merely shows that sod production in the U.S. is in a germinative stage of development. As a small Ohio grower put it, "New companies are springing up all over."

"New" is one of the most common words in the sod industry's vocabulary. "We are so new that it is difficult to determine dollar value (in the industry)," the Connecticut Cooperative Extension Service reports.

Ohio Extension Agronomist Don W. Griffis reinforces this opinion when he bluntly states, "Each day we hear of another sod producer in business or planning to go into the business . . . Without a knowledge of the

New Bentgrass Assn. "Off n' Running" in Oregon



Conferring officers for new Exeter Bentgrass Assn. in Albany, Ore., are, from left: Fenn Emerson, secretary-treasurer, Albany; Bill Rose, president, Woodburn; and Loren Hoven, vice-president, from Jefferson.

Bill Rose of Woodburn, Ore., has hoisted the flag to announce operations are now underway for the recently formed Exeter Bentgrass Assn. in Albany, Ore.

Rose was recently named president of this organization, which plans to promote better understanding of Exeter bentgrass, to maintain genetic purity of grass, and to assist in dissemination of information about the value and use of this new seed.

Exeter, developed and tested in Rhode Island, has proved to be an outstanding turfgrass, Rose says. A limited supply of seed will be available for consumer use this season.

Further information is available by writing to Exeter Bentgrass Assn., P. O. Box 356, Albany, Ore.

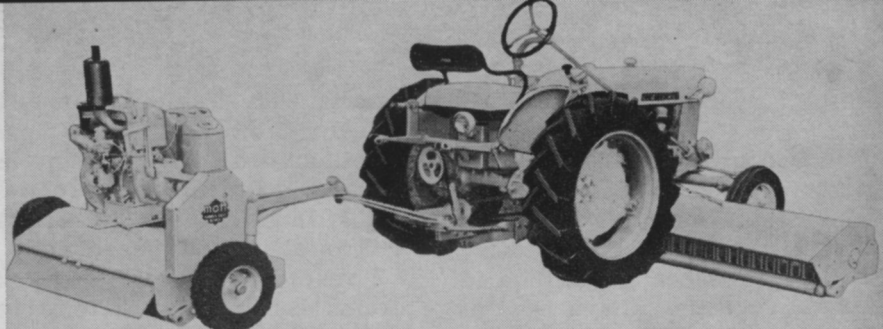
number of sod producers or the volume of business of these, I could not estimate with any accuracy the economic size of the sod industry. I am sure it is a sizeable industry, perhaps an unrecognized industry."

This picture, nebulous as it is, mirrors tabulated knowledge on the sod industry; known facts are virtually nonexistent. "Information on the sod industry is lacking not only for the country as a whole but within the states themselves," Henry W. Indyk, N.J. Extension Officer capsulized. "At present, this is a rapidly growing industry and any statistics compiled would become outdated rather quickly."

1,000 Sod Farms

Preliminary returns from early studies led WTT's research staff to project that about 105,000 acres are planted to sod on about 1,000 farms across the nation. (WTT estimates the average farm has 84 acres and each state has slightly more than 20 farms.)

Reports indicate, though, that there is no such thing as the



Light- and medium-duty mowing is accomplished quickly when 5-ft. LBS-5 is teamed up with 4-ft. HS model of Mott hammer-knife mowers. This arrangement gives the operator a cutting swath of 8½ feet employing smaller, lower-powered tractor for greater operational economy. Free-swinging flails have patented, self-cleaning cutting angle which also fold back when meeting with an obstruction and lessens tendency to throw stones or other objects that may be hidden on ground. Renovating and leaf mulching attachments are available as optional equipment. Complete information on this equipment may be obtained from Mott Corp., 500 Shawmut Ave., La Grange, Ill.

"average sod farm." Producers include nurseries which plant small plots to sod, farmers who cut up pasturelands and sell the turf, and large professional sod growers who conduct research and develop species. The table below, of sample figures from representative states, emphasizes the variations. The representative data below show the reported minimum number of farms in each state and the minimum total acreage.*

State	Farms	Acreage
Arizona	5	75
Arkansas	10	100
Florida	46	12,000
Georgia	33	300
Illinois	50	5,588
Maryland	250	7,000
Michigan	100	15,000
New York	20	3,410
Pennsylvania	10	1,000

*Based on estimates from officials in various states.

Conservative estimates put the sod industry's income at \$100 million annually. But reports from individual states hint that

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this guess may be exceedingly low.

James B. Beard, assistant professor of crop science at Michigan State University, believes that Michigan's sod industry alone approaches \$50 million in annual revenue. Elwyn Deal of the Maryland Extension Service estimates that state's annual dollar volume in sod to be about \$2 million. Florida claims to have an \$11 million capital investment in the sod industry. Massachusetts typifies states with little or no sod production where sales of sod shipped in from other areas still reaches several hundred thousand dollars.

Regional Prices Vary

If the variations in aggregate figures seem wide, the differences in sod prices are even more extreme. An Ohio sod grower

reports that Merion bluegrass sells for from 65c to \$1.00 per sq. yd. and the price is rising as demand goes up and supplies fall. He adds that bentgrass markets for about \$1.85 per sq. yd.

These prices for northern strains contrast significantly with the prices of southern grasses as reported in a 1963 Florida study. St. augustinegrass then cost less than 25c per sq. yd., bermudagrass was 38c per sq. yd., and zoysiagrass sold for 67c per sq. yd. In all regions the primary market for sod includes landscape contractors and homeowners as well as golf courses and some industrial accounts.

With this wide fluctuation in size, volume, and prices, the reasons for the lack of mutual understanding become clearer. Some states (Florida and Wisconsin, for example) exempt sod

from the definition of nursery stock. An Iowa horticulturist notes that in his state there is more acreage sold from pasture grown sod than from nursery grown sod. Reports from the Pacific Northwest indicate that sod production is relatively small because climate conditions usually favor good growth from seed-planted lawns.

These varied reports again affirm the substantial lack of communication within the industry. And this Sod Industry Section seeks to fill the void in what is obviously a growing field.

Vast Potential Market

Sod uses are many. WTT's introductory survey uncovered sod producers who sell to golf courses, parks, highway departments, and other industrial/municipal/institutional markets. One New Hampshire grower provides the sod used at Boston's Fenway Park stadium. Even in the Northwest where seed-planted lawns flourish, Norman Goetze of the Oregon State University extension service speculates a "real potential for the sod industry because of the difficulty in maintaining (turf) on heavy wear areas such as golf course tees and football fields."

The future is bright for the multimillion dollar sod industry in America. The comment of a New England agronomist wraps up feeling across the nation. "Frankly," he confided, "there is a market for more sod growers in this area if someone is interested in growing grass sod under good conditions."

And that is the purpose of this new Sod Industry Section: to help both present and potential sod growers develop their businesses. Future editions will include studies of preferred grass species, seeding and fertility rates, weed control practices, and market development tips. There will also be "portraits" of leading sod producers.

Sod growers have asked WTT about turf equipment, seed mixtures for specific areas, trade associations, and business practices. Coming issues will answer these and other questions important to the sod grower. As



This Cyclone Model 99 is a new pull-type broadcast spreader/seedler designed to spread fertilizer, seed, and other materials without stripes and double overlaps. Cyclone makes a manual model also.

Cyclone Spreader/Seeder Out

A new Model 99 pull-type broadcast spreader/seedler designed to give the same spreading results as older Cyclone Model B is now being marketed by The Cyclone Seeder Co.

Hopper capacity is 100 pounds of average material; it is constructed of galvanized steel and finished in baked enamel. Spreading mechanism consisting of feed guides, rotary agitator, and control cable is made of stainless steel.

Designed for spreading fertilizer, seed, granular herbicides,

granular insecticides, ice melters, soil conditioners, etc., Model 99 can achieve a spread width up to 10 feet, depending on the material being dispensed.

Another spreader, Model 100, is a new push-type spreader/seedler and is equipped with wheelbarrow-type handles for manual operation. It has the same features as the pull-type. Spreading mechanisms of both machines are ground driven.

Applicators interested in obtaining more information on these products can write to the company at Urbana, Indiana.

results of the current WTT production and sod industry surveys are compiled, a more distinct image of the American sod business will emerge. WTT stands ready to record the action as the expanding industry begins to climb its giant ladder into turf significance. Comments from readers will be most welcome.

Dutch Elm Disease Spreading Westward, Pathologist Warns

Dutch elm disease, which has caused widespread havoc in the Midwest, is steadily inching farther west, according to a recent warning by Dr. L. E. Dickins, extension plant pathologist at Colorado State University, Fort Collins.

The dreaded malady already has spread into most eastern Kansas counties, and a number of cases are reported for the first time in eastern Nebraska counties, the doctor points out.

Although this westward movement may take some time, "we cannot overemphasize the potential hazard to our elms," Dr. Dickins cautions.

There are no known cures for the menace, the pathologist explained, but a number of preventive measures are known:

(1) Control native and European elm bark beetles which carry the fungus; (2) assure tree's health by proper pruning, fertilization, and watering; (3) clean up old elm wood piles, and strip bark from logs and stumps to prevent bark beetle buildup; (4)

burn all dead elm trees; and (5) use mixed plantings with resistant tree species to reduce disease hazards.

A symptom of Dutch elm disease is wilting or flagging of one or more branches high in a tree's crown. Sapwood of wilted branches becomes brown-streaked, and leaves will probably fall prematurely.

Dickins says these symptoms are not always reliable, therefore suspected infestations should be confirmed by laboratory analysis. He asks that all such specimens in Colorado be mailed to him at the Fort Collins campus. Select wilted, but still living branches, 1/2 in. or more in diameter, and wrap them in foil before mailing.

GSCAA Moves Offices to Ill.

Headquarters of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America were moved to Des Plaines in suburban Chicago, Ill., on July 1. The old offices at Jacksonville Beach, Fla., closed.

L. R. (Bob) Shields Jr., president of GCSAA, announced that the new address is 3158 Des Plaines Ave., Des Plaines, Ill. 60018. The new telephone number is (312) 824-6147.

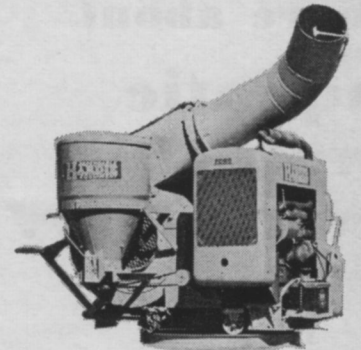
"We are moving our base of operations to Des Plaines to a more geographically central location to provide better and faster service to our members," Shields told WTT.



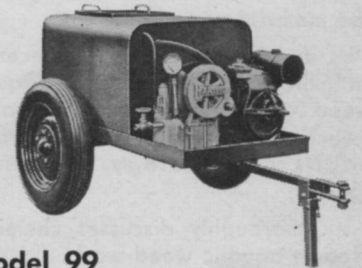
A new ground sprayer for applying invert emulsions has been developed by the Minnesota Wanner Co., Minneapolis. Exact proportions of water and brush killer are mixed in a small chamber in spray gun under pressure, producing a very viscous white mixture which is also very adhesive. This process develops such desirable results as controlled droplet size and heavy viscosity that does not lend itself to drift in form of fog or mist; it cannot be washed off by rain. Its white color makes it easy to observe while application is in process according to company. Complete information is obtainable from Kent Wanner, Minnesota Wanner Co., 5145 Eden Ave., Minneapolis.

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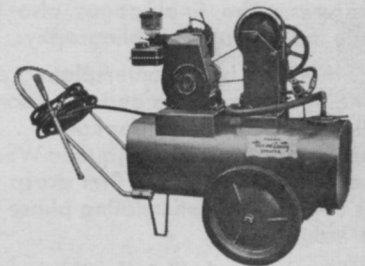
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