

Current Trends in Sod Production

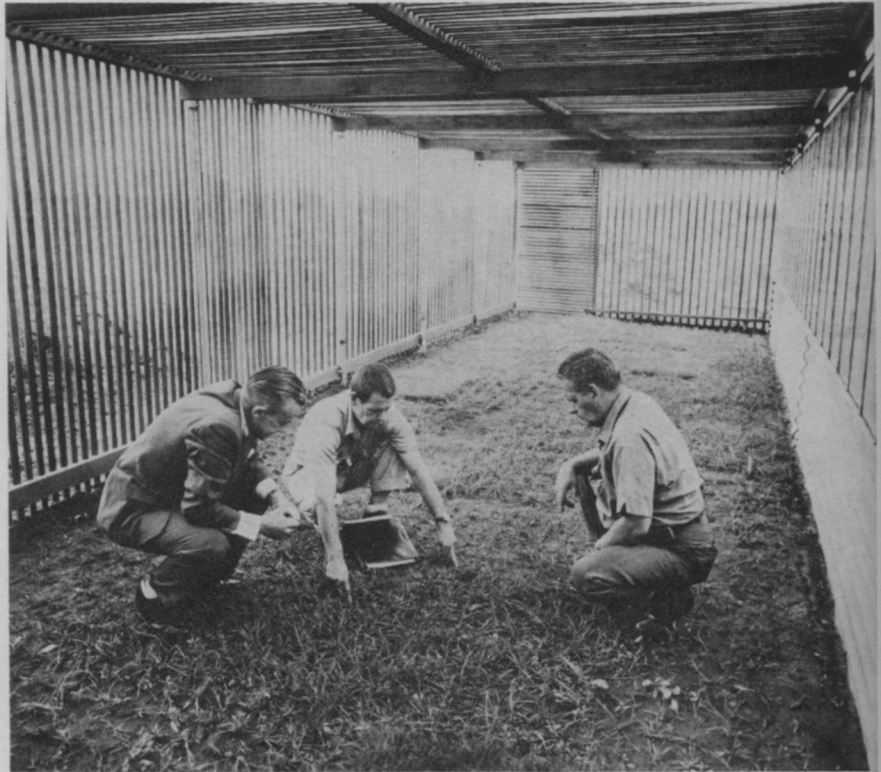
AMERICA'S cultivated sod industry has seen at least two milestones which have been major stimulants to its growth. The development of the powered sod cutters in the late 40's and the introduction of Merion bluegrass in the early 50's contributed tremendously to the expansion of sod growing. Staying ahead of today's business may help to develop other milestones and to correctly evaluate proposed changes as steps forward or backward.

While such changes in the past have arisen without pressure from our industry, more and more such changes should be industry stimulated. Constant evaluation of growing and handling techniques should reveal many places for improvement. With the size the industry is achieving, we should be increasingly successful in encouraging equipment manufacturers to develop machinery designed for our needs.

The labor-consuming job of rolling sod seems to be coming closer to a solution. The entire

By **BEN WARREN**

Warren's Turf Nursery, Palos Park, Illinois



Progressive sod producers like Ben Warren (center) perform extensive research on their sod farms. The structure above enables Warren personnel to test new shade-growing Kentucky bluegrass under various sunlight intensities. Looking on above are Robert Warren (right) and marketing advisor W. P. Pettit. Building is in Palos Park, Illinois.

WTT's Sod Industry Section to Be Monthly Feature

HERE IS the first of a new monthly feature of *Weeds Trees and Turf* devoted exclusively to production and marketing of cultivated turfgrass sod in America.

This section is being initiated because of the growing importance of sod farming, and because there is presently no regular coverage of problems unique to sod growers available in other media.

While the section will be of particular value and interest to sod growers themselves, other *WTT* readers will also find these articles helpful. Those who sell or install sod, those who are called on to treat lawns grown from sod, and those who buy sod for installation will find the articles in *SIS* of note.

Many months in preparation, *SIS* is the result of extensive surveys of state agricultural departments and turf agronomists, trade associations, turfgrass producers, and others. During the months when data on sod

production were being gathered by *WTT*'s market research staff, other personnel were assembling comprehensive articles from some of the best minds in the industry today.

In the coming months, this section will deal in detail with such topics as new methods of harvesting sod; advantages of automatic irrigation; new concepts of transporting sod from farm to market; labor management on the sod farm; and other such subjects.

In addition to these feature articles, *SIS* will contain a number of news and product stories, along with advertising pertaining specifically to sod production.

The editors feel this new portion of *WTT* is a necessary addition because of editorial policies, which have dictated that *WTT* become the single authoritative national monthly covering all three phases of nonfarm vegetation maintenance and control.

operation of moving the products from the field to the consumer's location should undergo many changes. The patent office has issued several patents on machines for forming sod into rolls in the past several years, and it would seem that in the near future a reliable machine should be on the market. However, there seems to be a rising interest in the North in handling sod flat, as has been the southern practice. There has been some work done by individual growers in flat handling and mechanical placement of sod on pallets. Palletizing and mechanical loading and unloading of deliveries is a minor factor in the industry today and will be subject to much serious appraisal.

One-Crop Acreage

Most of the new acreage in sod production has been a "one-crop" endeavor. In the North, much of this has been devoted to Merion bluegrass. Consideration for the future indicates an investigation of diversification. Merion is an excellent grass



Demonstration beds like these, on view at Warren's Palos Park (Ill.) farms, let customers see the exact type of sod which they will purchase from this major turfgrass producer. Customers for cultivated sod may be landscapers, nurserymen, golf course superintendents, highway landscape maintenance supervisors, or those who retail to homeowners. Characteristic of the phenomenal growth of the sod production business is the adoption of modern marketing techniques such as these demonstration plots. Warren's Turf Nursery also carries out experimentation to develop techniques to solve the many problems in harvesting, storage, and transportation of sod.

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when used in the proper environment, but there are many areas in which it will not perform satisfactorily.

Locations such as highway rights-of-way, shaded lawns, and athletic fields are illustrations of areas poorly or questionably served by Merion. Evaluation of turf species available now and their adaption to these uses reveals opportunity to diversify. The breeding and selection work

underway in the country should broaden the possibilities of better serving many of these new requirements.

This development work is being done by both industry- and tax-supported programs. New releases from the former will most likely be accompanied by efforts to retain a degree of control, since the cost of development is substantial. Plans for the future should include the

possibility of licensing or franchising arrangements which could be part of a varietal release.

Arrangements of this kind are common in other industries and should find ready acceptance among sod growers. The advantages are two-fold. Enabling the developer to maintain exclusive rights to a variety follows the philosophy of our patent laws and encourages investment in this kind of progress. And the growers should benefit by avoiding over-production.

Active promotional programs directed towards increasing volume through advertising, public relations, and sales effort is expanding in the industry and in a few years should become a universal practice.

Developments such as these should see the production more and more in the hands of well-rounded turf nurseries producing a complete line of grass for all purposes and less growing of sod by farmers who shift from crop to crop depending on variations in the markets.

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