

Home Builder Becomes Sod Grower

Tired of importing sod 700 miles from Iowa, a Denver, Colorado home contractor decided several years ago to grow sod himself. At the time, sod for lawns was virtually nonexistent in Colorado. But, in the last five years, sod production has expanded and the builder has semi-retired from the construction business to devote almost full time to his growing turf concern.

The man, K. C. Ensor, who has built 5,000 homes in metropolitan Denver, organized Green Valley Turf Co. primarily for his landscape needs. Now, in its third year of operation, Green Valley serves an expanding market, each year bringing greater sales for its bluegrass sod. Currently Green Valley's local clientele ranges from Boulder (35 miles north) to Pueblo (over 100 miles south). In addition regular shipments are made into Wyoming and to other parts of the Rocky Mountain area. The market is rather evenly spread among residential, commercial, educational, and military users, while golf courses and highway departments comprise but a fraction of the sales.

1965 saw 170 acres under cultivation. Despite a ravaging flood early this summer which destroyed almost 50% of the crop, Green Valley has bounced back and now intends to step up its production to 300 to 500 acres in the next three to five years.

Kentucky, Park, and Merion bluegrass are Green Valley's top crops. They are seeded, grown and harvested over a period ranging from 10 to 24 months. Completely new reseeding is done after every harvest. In addition to regular chemical fertilization, some 45,000 yards of humus and animal manure are added annually.

Undesired vegetation such as weeds have been very successfully controlled by frequent applications of weedkillers, in addition to Green Valley's practice



Green Valley's J. R. Wilkins oversees 35-mile irrigation pipe, 5,500 sprinkler system.



Field workers follow sod cutter, rolling sections of turf to be put on pallet ready for market.



In another operation, rolled turf is loaded by conveyor onto truck for delivery to customer.

of carrying each crop through at least one dormant winter season. Only one problem, quackgrass, still plagues the company, but since it only affects a small part of the crop, Green Valley officials are not overly concerned with it now.

Colorado's semi-arid climate poses special problems for the sodman. Constant heavy irrigation is needed, which makes the venture prohibitive to many potential sod growers. Green Valley, using water from river-bottom wells, irrigates up to 2.2 million gallons daily through a network of some 35 miles of light-weight aluminum pipe which feeds about 6,000 rotating Rainbird sprinklers, all automatically sequenced by time-control valves. This elaborate water system also provides the route for closely controlled fertilization.

Good transportation equipment and materials-handling devices are of essence, Green Valley Secretary-Treasurer V. Nelson Shurts points out. "The company's management is involved

in a never-ending search and re-search for materials handling equipment," he told WTT. To date the most successful method they have found is the palletizing of nine-foot-square rolls. Mechanical conveyers of various sizes and purposes are also utilized wherever possible.

Mowing is done twice weekly during summer months by a combination of two flail mowers, one large diesel-powered seven-gang mower and one custom-built rotary mower. The latter is designed for use under irrigation pipes.

Seven tractors with plows, discs, roto-tillers, land levelers, and rollers ease bulk work. Other equipment includes a power sprayer, a rock picker, three sod cutters, miscellaneous small mowers, sweepers, two on-farm trucks, and three highway trucks (including trailers and special four-dual-wheeled dolly with a fifth wheel to handle semi-trailers in the field). Supervisory personnel find an electric powered golf cart especially useful in moving quickly and softly

over turf and delicate aluminum irrigation pipe. The company maintains a complete repair shop tooled with everything from a blacksmith's forge to modern welding equipment to service this array of equipment.

Green Valley holds membership in the Rocky Mountain Turf-grass Association and in the Mid-America Sod Producers Association. Other company officers include Vice President J. Russell Wilkins and General Superintendent Jim L. Jones. Green Valley headquarters are at 7951 South Santa Fe Drive in suburban Littleton, Colo.

MSU Names S. H. Wittwer Director of Ag Station

Dr. Sylvan H. Wittwer, professor of horticulture at Michigan State University, has been named director of the university's agricultural experiment station, with the title of Assistant Dean in MSU's College of Agriculture.

Wittwer joined MSU's agricultural research division in 1946.

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