

Future Market Potential for Sod Growers

Highlights U. of Md. Meeting Last Month

Sod grass is big business in Maryland and it is a growing business, but it is not a business for everyone, Brian Finger, Montgomery County Extension Agent, cautioned last month. He reported that there are now some 250 Maryland farms that offer cultivated sod for sale.

Speaking to an overflow crowd in the University of Maryland Center of Adult Education, during the March 2nd Maryland Sod Producers Conference, Finger said an acre of high-quality cultivated sod can be marketed for nearly \$3,000, but this is by no means all profit. To begin with, the high cost of land in the metropolitan areas is a limiting factor, but even if land is available, the cash outlay to establish sod is considerable.

He considers the outlook for sod farming in the metropolitan

Washington, D.C., area as bright, but reminded landowners that capital needs can be quite high. He listed expenses of nearly \$1,000 per acre (not including labor and land costs) before quality sod is ready for market.

Potential Outlined

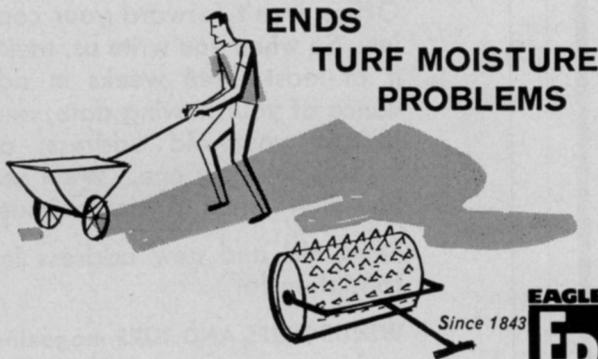
But the market is growing, Finger forecast. Single-family-type dwellings are being built at the rate of 17,000 a year and apartments are going up at the rate of 30,000 units yearly. In Montgomery County alone, he said, it is expected that 40 new schools will be built in the next 20 years; the totals for Prince Georges County may be even higher, and along with most of the new schools go athletic fields. New communities, industrial installations and government agencies are moving to the

suburbs, and parks and golf clubs are coming into being. All these are potential sod customers, he observed. Maryland's 7,000 acres now in commercial sod production will have to increase to meet the demand.

Following up the idea of high-quality sod, Joseph Newcomer, University of Maryland Extension agronomist, reported many of the states bordering Maryland have already enacted sod laws. He said the FreeState emphasis will be on a sod certification program.

Programs under consideration provide that certified sod will be grown from certified seed on a field that has been approved before planting and the sod will have to be inspected before it is sold. According to Newcomer, Maryland "Approved" sod will not have to be grown from certi-

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fied seed, but to be classified as such it will have to be grown from seed approved by the State Board of Agriculture inspectors.

He said he believes this program will assure Maryland producers a fair market for their crop and users will be assured of getting a quality product.

M. Hanford Day, head of Maryland's State Board of Agriculture seed testing laboratory, urged all sod growers to insist on certified seed, but to also read the label to make sure the seed meets the individual standards set by the user. "You should have some minimum specifications, and you should have them written down," he advised. If seed is bought on specification, Day added, payment can be made after a laboratory test shows the seed to be as advertised.

Edward F. Mayne, owner of Mayne Realty Co., Olney, Md., urged the group to adopt a uniform contract for sod sales. He said such a contract should include a description and location of the sod, the price, terms of

payment, and the time of removal of the sod. This type of contract, he added, protects both the producer and user of sod.

The conference was sponsored by the University of Maryland Department of Agronomy and the Cooperative Extension Service. Program coordinators were Brian Finger and Dr. Elwyn Deal, turf specialist at the University.

18-Month Turfgrass Course Begins at MSU in September

A new course, combining four quarters of classroom study and several months of on-the-job training, will provide individuals interested in turf management with technical knowledge and practical skill to more easily step into this fast-expanding industry.

Beginning Sept. 29 at Michigan State University, East Lansing, students will study basic plant science, biochemistry, turfgrass uses, maintenance, and writing and speaking. The second quarter includes plant diseases, principles of turf culture, applied

entomology, landscape drafting, and other subjects.

Two quarters of on-the-job training will extend from March 20, 1967, to September 28, 1967. This will be followed by two more quarters of classroom work to graduation time in March, 1968. To graduate, a student is required to accumulate 65 credits for on-campus study with a "C" average, and 10 credits of placement training.

Admission to this school requires a student be a high school graduate. Graduates of the course will be provided placement service.

Members of the turfgrass industry, associated with public parks, golf courses, highway landscaping, sod farming, athletic fields, and estates, will offer opportunities for on-the-job training.

For complete information, including cost, room and board, interested readers should write to the Short Course Department, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Mich.

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