

## What Good Is a Sod Growers Association?

In numbers there is strength. It makes no difference what the organization—be it the Army, Navy, business, politics or a trade association. A group of individuals or firms carry more weight and can accomplish more than an individual person or firm.

Starting in 1952 Warren's Turf Nursery began to try to convince the Highway Department of the State of Illinois that its sod specifications were wrong. We spent several years making calls on various individuals in the Highway Department and got absolutely nowhere.

Later on, after a sod association was formed, the bureaucrats at the Illinois State Capitol in Springfield changed their minds and listened to the association. Following briefly are the facts.

The Illinois Highway Department had a specification calling for 2½ to 3 inches of soil for sod planted on Illinois highways.

A survey of all state highway departments at this time revealed that the Illinois specifications were the most unreasonable.

For instance, Wisconsin called for ¾ inches of soil, Indiana 1 to 1½ inches. All other states, where sodding was done, were more reasonable than Illinois. No one was furnishing sod for Illinois highways 2½ to 3 inches thick. However, whenever an operator of a turf nursery tried to supply sod at a reasonable thickness his sod was usually rejected. Pasture sod was accepted regardless of the thickness, but not nursery sod. We made numerous calls to the Landscape Engineer at Springfield and to his assistants scattered over the state. Only two fellows, out of 10 or 12, concurred with our claim. They told us we were fighting a losing battle. The Landscape Engineer at Springfield actually tried to discourage us by flatly stating that sodding contractors had all the sod they

By **ROBERT M. WARREN**  
Warren's Turf Nursery, Palos Park, Illinois

needed and that the idea of nursery-grown sod was ridiculous.

One person implied that thin cut sod, delivered where specifications called for 3 inches of soil was a juicy source of graft for the ward heelers in the Illinois Highway Department. (For a bribe they would approve thin cut sod.) He would not name names nor be specific.

### Lobbyist Said, "Form Association."

To make a long story short, Warren's Turf Nursery hired a lobbyist and sent him down to Springfield in an effort to correct this foolishness. He spent the better part of a year on this project and finally came up with the finding that the only way we would accomplish anything was to form a Growers Association. He said the politicians and bureaucrats will listen to a group, but not to an individual

firm. We then contacted Carl Habeneck of H & E Sod Nursery, Roy Muller of Muller Sod Farm, Al Shopper of The Sod Nursery (now out of business), Gerald Dearie of Dearie & Strud (now Thornton's Turf Nursery), and several smaller growers.

We got together for a luncheon and decided to explore the possibility of an association. After two or three more meetings a set of bylaws was formulated, officers elected, and The Sod Growers Association of Illinois was born. This organizational work took place in late 1957 and early 1958.

Our first major effort was to prove to the State of Illinois that its highway sodding specifications were incorrect. This was done by a demonstration planting on the Congress Street Expressway (now the Eisenhower Expressway) in Chicago.

*If the association never accomplishes any more than the Congress Street demonstration, the Association will have been worthwhile.* As a result of this demonstration, the State of Illinois has changed its specifications and millions upon millions of square yards of nursery-grown sod have been planted on Illinois highways.

Every sod grower in Wisconsin, Indiana, and Illinois has benefited by this work done by the association on Congress Street. Not only have sod growers in these three states benefited but growers from as far away as New York and Denver have been helped. As a result of Illinois findings on Congress Street, other states have followed Illinois in its specification changes. Every yard of sod used on the highways took a yard off the home lawn market, thus helping to keep prices firm.

### What An Association Can Do

To have a strong successful organization there must be a motivation or an incentive fac-

---



---

#### Present Officers of SOD GROWERS ASSOCIATION of Mid-America

15515 Wolf Road, Orland Park, Illinois

##### President:

Leroy Mueller, Mueller Sod Nursery

##### Vice President:

Dale Habenicht, H & E Sod Nursery

##### Treasurer:

Tom Thornton, Thornton's Turf Nursery

##### Secretary:

Don Morrill, Shamrock Turf Nursery

##### Board of Directors:

Dick Horner, Horner Farms; Tom Thornton, Thornton's Turf Nursery; Ben O. Warren, Warren's Turf Nursery.

##### Technical Consultant:

Dr. Michael P. Britton

##### Executive Secretary:

Mrs. Dorothy H. Carey

---



---

tor. The Illinois sod association's first motivation was the Congress Street experiment. And there are many places where a strong association can help the industry. Some of them are:

Correcting specifications on the part of the Army and Navy which use a lot of sod, and correcting specifications by landscape architects. The association can and should advise landscapers on sodding problems; the association is in a position to warn the public and landscapers against unscrupulous marketers of questionable lawn or turf products. An individual firm cannot, in good taste, do so.

A financially strong association will aid various universities in research grants, which will return benefits to every sod producer in the nation.

At this very moment a producer of fertilizer, seed, and chemicals is promoting a new strain of bluegrass as seed and sod. This new bluegrass has not been proven. An association can warn the public of this coming flood of high-powered, mislead-

ing advertising of an unproven product. A single firm or individual cannot do so.

Another place where a strong association fits is the exchange of credit information. The American Association of Nurserymen has been highly successful in credit information exchange, and our own association is doing a fair job in credit control. It can do a better job with more members.

#### Can Advise Neophyte Growers

A strong association can advise people planning to enter into sod production as to their possibilities and costs. Altogether too many people with a few acres of land, little or no working capital, with a big wishbone, and *no backbone* are entering this field. They are going broke themselves and helping to depress sod prices at the same time.

Now, I don't care how you slice it; it takes at least \$250,000.00 of capital to establish a 200-acre turf nursery when land values are at or near \$600.00 per acre. If

more people were made aware of this cost, less of them would be jumping into the sod business, and prices would be more stable.

#### III. Assn. Attracts Out-of-State Growers

Getting back to the Illinois sod association, it was noticed about two years ago that growers were joining from outside Illinois. We had attracted Wisconsin, Indiana, and Michigan growers. So the word "Illinois" was deleted and "Mid-America" inserted. Today the organization is known as The Sod Growers Association of Mid-America.

My personal opinion is that the name should again be changed to The Sod Association of America because today we have members from New York to California and until recently, a Canadian grower. Incidentally the Canadian got angry and resigned when, in self defense American growers, working through the association, were influential in getting duty collected on sod moving into the States from Canada. The associa-

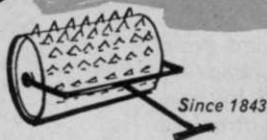
*New*

Not a clay!

**DIALOAM**



**ENDS  
TURF MOISTURE  
PROBLEMS**



Since 1843



**EAGLE-PICHER**

Eagle-Picher Industries, Inc.  
American Building, Dept. W-5  
Cincinnati, Ohio 45201



Please send me more information on DIALOAM Soil Conditioner plus a free sample.

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

REPRESENTING \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_

## WITCHGRASS

(*Panicum capillare*)



Witchgrass, known also as tumble panicgrass, witches hair, and ticklegrass, is native to the United States but has spread to several countries in Europe. In the U.S., it is found growing along roadsides, in gardens, flower beds, and near parks particularly where soil is sandy and dry.

This grass is common in the north central states and is not frequently found in the West. Witchgrass is a shallow-rooted (1), annual species and reproduces only by seeds.

Seeds (3) are  $\frac{1}{16}$  inch long, shiny, smooth, and grayish or greenish. They are borne singly at the tip of small, stiff branches of the flower head (panicle) which is from 8 to 14 inches long and often one-half the length of the entire plant. When mature the panicle is large, bushy, and greatly spread. Its branches are brittle and threadlike. Often the panicle (2) is snapped off by a breeze and carried by the wind with the seeds intact. Seeds are distributed widely by this means being easily separated from their hulls when ripe.

Depending on the length of the growing season and soil fertility, stems grow from 2 inches to 2 feet tall. They are hairy, especially at the nodes. Stems branch mostly from the base of the plant, which habitually spreads as it grows, giving a bushy appearance.

Soft hairs are found on both sides of the leaves, and are very dense and long on the leaf sheaths. Leaves are 6 to 12 inches long and  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch broad.

Witchgrass flowers between July and October at most U.S. latitudes, depending upon the local climate.

If this weed is not controlled by cultivation in stubble and grain fields, seeds blow to roadsides or areas not maintained, and the plant becomes established. Germinating seeds are killed by pre-emergence treatments of 2,4-D at 1 lb. per acre, DCPA, atrazine, and other herbicides. Close mowing as soon as seed begins to develop will destroy the plant and prevent it from seeding elsewhere.

Prepared in cooperation with Crops Research Division, Agricultural Research Service, United States Department of Agriculture, Beltsville, Maryland

(DRAWING FROM NORTH CENTRAL REGIONAL PUBLICATION NO. 36, USDA EXTENSION SERVICE)

tion accomplished this quickly. An individual firm would have had difficulty slowing up the importation of cheap Canadian sod. Landscapers in the Buffalo and Cleveland areas are now reporting difficulty in bringing in Canadian sod because of lengthy tieups at Customs.

There is no grower anywhere in the United States that has not benefited one way or another from the efforts of The Sod Growers Association of Mid-America. And the association is still sitting on the taxi strip waiting for a clearance to take off!

As I mentioned before there must be a motivation, a stimulant, a common cause to bind and hold an association together. The Congress Street experiment was the original spark. The field day held at Warren's Turf Nursery in August of 1964 helped, and our Newsletter has served to a small degree to keep the light burning. For your own self preservation, for the good of the profession that feeds you, you should be a member. If you are not one now, you should join. If you are a member, you should give willingly of some of your time to help make the association a vital, strong organization.

Nothing is gained without effort. The men who have served as officers and directors of the association, since its birth in 1958, have given willingly of their time. All growers have been helped in one way or another. So why not throw in with the leaders and help your own bank accounts by becoming a full-fledged Class A member?

### Rompers to Knee Pants

The sod industry is still in its infancy. It is just now beginning to get out of rompers and into knee pants. In the next 10 years it will grow to undreamed of proportions and those of you who are a part of the industry should help yourselves by helping your association into a strong organization that will carry weight with Federal, state and local governments and with builders, architects, contractors, and other commercial organizations everywhere.

For a moment, let's take a look at the potential of the sod mar-

ket. By the year 2000, just 34 years from now, there will be a population in the United States of at least 400 million, probably more, if the population explosion continues during the next one-third of a century as it has in the last third of a century. Are you aware that the population of the United States has almost doubled since Herbert Hoover ran against Al Smith in 1928?

This expected population increase will mean at least 50 million new homes, with an average lawn area of at least 1,000 square yards, a total of 50 billion square yards. When we sell the public hard enough on sod (and we will sell them) as opposed to seed, making certain that all these new lawns are sodded, the annual national requirement for sod will run between 1½ to 2 billion yards for a total of from 1 to 2 billion dollars. This does not include sod needed for public buildings, highways, schools, golf courses, cemeteries, factories, etc.

This is big business. It will be highly competitive and will no

doubt incur governmental control. There never has been a business that developed a sizeable dollar volume that did not attract government bureaucrats and leeches to it. The sod industry is no exception. These government inspectors will never have been called upon to meet a payroll or sell a bill of goods, but you'll have to live with them. In self defense, from governmental regulations alone, we will need a strong association of turf growers to meet with and pacify these "busybodies" who carry the authority of government in their brief cases.

Here are just a few things that the association can do to benefit the industry as a whole and that needs doing now.

1. Correct incorrect specifications.
2. Warn the landscapers against questionable lawn products.
3. Discourage articles of misinformation such as one university professor's claim in a magazine article that sod growers net \$1500.00 per acre. Such articles should be challenged and the association should do the challenging.
4. Put pressure on chemical firms who are gouging growers pricewise.

One chemical manufacturer is today charging the grower retail prices. A garden store buys for less than the grower.

5. Put pressure on Congress to increase tariffs on sod imported from Canada at ruinous prices.

6. Put pressure on the Federal and State Departments of Agriculture on unreasonable plant quarantine laws.

7. Promote the use of sod on highways rather than the planting of excess nursery stock which eventually makes a jungle and calls for more expensive maintenance.

8. Make contributions and grants to various universities for grass research work.

9. Explore the advantages of sod certification such as seed certification. I am not sure we need certification, but we should explore the advantages and disadvantages of certification.

10. Educate the public on the use of sod as opposed to seed.

11. Report to growers the merits of various equipment such as sod rollers, conveyors, palletizing, etc.

12. Advise and assist growers in marketing programs, costs, mark-ups, pricing policies, accounting, sales, and advertising practices. And above all, stimulate better distributor, dealer-grower relationships.

13. Arrange for and carry out a national convention or field day to be primarily supported by vendors to the sod industry through the purchase of exhibition space.

14. Warn and advise farmers against cow-pasture sodders who are usually under financed and are often found stripping a farmer's bluegrass pasture and then skip out without paying the farmer.

There is always of course the tendency to "Let George do it." There are just not enough hours for 3 or 4 men to do the entire job and still manage their own businesses. A good example is the compiling and editing of the Newsletter. It usually takes a day or so to get it together. This time has got to come from somewhere. In my case it has been evenings and Sundays simply because I've too many other duties in connection with Warren's Turf Nursery.

One thing the association needs badly is a full-time executive secretary. His efforts will help cement and firm up a stronger organization and in the long run develop the association into one of the more aggressive trade associations.

Look about you at other professions and business operations. See how they have benefited themselves. The AAN, American Association of Nurserymen, and its affiliated state organizations,

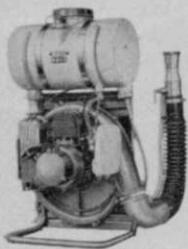


# PLATZ

## For EFFECTIVE Weed and Pest Control

Whether you need a motor-driven atomizer or a plunger sprayer, there's a Platz model to do your job best. Motor-driven models can be used as sprayers or dusters without changing the plastic tanks and have flame-throwing lances for burning weeds or thawing. You can't find greater efficiency or more versatility at a lower price.

**2-HP PLATZ** — \$149.50 F.O.B. Youngstown. Weighs 15 lbs. 2½-gallon tank. Horizontal range 26 feet, vertical 20 feet. Throttle controls stepless dusting rate. Sprayer has 4 delivery speeds.



**3-HP BOSS** — \$239.50 F.O.B. Youngstown. Weighs 30½ lbs. 2½-gallon tank. Horizontal range 46 feet, vertical 30 feet. Has long range nozzle and twin nozzle for simultaneous spraying of two rows.

**FRANKONIA** — \$69.50 F.O.B. Youngstown. Weighs 20 lbs. 4-gallon tank, made of heavy-gauge sheet brass. Powerful brass pump. Robust suction filter. Self-cleaning valves.

Phone, write, wire



## BURTON SUPPLY COMPANY, INC.

Import Division, Box 929-W, Youngstown, Ohio 44501 • Phone 747-4485 (Area Code 216)

**FULL SUPPLY OF SPARE PARTS FOR 24-HOUR DELIVERY**



have sold the Federal Government lock, stock, and barrel on its "Plant America" sales pitch; even got Lady Bird chasing around the country buying nursery stock, with your money, to plant-out signs and automobile grave yards. I understand she's a good saleslady; we ought to get her selling sod instead of shrubbery.

And examine the trade unions. You are at their mercy because they stick together. *They are organized. You are not.*

Let's just see what could be accomplished when the *Sod Growers of America* takes a page out of the nurserymen's book and begins to sell lawns instead of shrubbery. We've got a lot stronger selling pitch in the way of maintenance cost than the bush peddlers have. Are you aware, that some of the new expressways are being planted so heavily to nursery stock that within ten years all the grassed areas will have to be hand mowed. Right there is one fight sod growers can tie into and in so doing add profits to your individual operations. But it takes an association to do the spade work. An individual firm cannot do it alone.

#### Competition Looms

Sooner or later the seed boys are going to wake up and start hitting back at us sod busters. They are going to find ways to produce lawns faster with seed and when that day comes, unless we are prepared, they will jerk the rug right out from under us and we are going to be in trouble. In areas such as Detroit, Milwaukee, and Chicago, it is of course, unusual to see a lawn being seeded. Naturally this cuts into grass seed sales. Some smart cookie in the seed business is going to start snipping at us and if we are not prepared it will be our fault. *A strong association can help sell the public so strongly on sod that it will be difficult for any seed producer or seed association to ever catch us.*

We, in the profession of growing grass which is to be marketed as turf or sod, can use as a guidepost or beacon light the advice of the renowned architect, Daniel Burnham. It went something

like this: "Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men's blood; make big plans, aim high, remembering that a noble diagram once recorded will never die."

In my early days of selling, a highly successful salesman, a Frenchman, used to advise me, "aim at ze stars young man; you may hit ze moon."

"As a man thinks, so he goes."

#### Wetting Agent Doesn't Guarantee Weedkilling

The common notion that a surfactant or wetting agent makes a chemical weedkiller work better because it more thoroughly wets the plant is only partly true.

University of California Botanist David E. Bayer, speaking at the 18th annual California Weed Conference held recently at Riverside, reported that "it has been found that the wetting of plant surfaces does not correlate with the increase in toxicity of the herbicide."

It is important to wet the plant well, he said. However, tests have shown that maximum wetting takes place when the amount of surfactant ranges from one-hundredth to one-tenth of one per cent of the total solution. But the most effective concentration of surfactant is always higher than that. Bayer says that 2,4-D-type weedkillers generally show most toxicity at from one-fourth to one-half of one percent, while most others—such as dalapon, amitrole and paraquat—work best at the one-half to one per cent level.

Many factors influence effectiveness of a chemical herbicide, Bayer said. Characteristics of the plant, position and size of leaf, type of leaf surface, age, and condition of the plant, all are important.

Weather makes a big difference, too. "In areas of high humidity, cool temperature, the need to include a surfactant in the herbicide spray solution is much less than in areas of low humidity and high temperatures," Bayer said. If it is extremely hot and dry, the benefit of using a surfactant will be somewhat less, he concluded.

## Meeting Dates



- International Shade Tree Conference, Western Chapter, Annual Meeting, Towne House, Fresno, Calif., May 15-18.
- Kansas Arborist Assn. 1966 Field Day, Independence, June 6.
- Mississippi Turfgrass Conference, Mississippi State University, State College, June 6-7.
- 18th Annual Nurserymen's Refresher Course, Cal-Poly College, San Luis Obispo, Calif., June 7-8.
- Mississippi Valley Golf Course Superintendent's Assn., Meeting, Greenbriar Country Club, St. Louis, Mo., June 8.
- Plains-New Mexico Nurserymen's Assn. Convention, Sheraton Inn, El Paso, Texas, June 12-14.
- Hyacinth Control Society, Annual Meeting, Ramada Inn, Lakeland, Florida, June 19-22.
- New Jersey Society of Certified Tree Experts, Meeting, Essex County Highway Dept., Verona, June 20.
- Cornell University 1966 Short Course for Arborists, Nurserymen, Landscapers, Ives Hall, Ithaca, N. Y., July 6-8.
- Connecticut Nurserymen's Assn. Summer Meeting, Cuzz-Acres Nursery, Orange, July 13.
- Mississippi Valley Golf Course Superintendent's Assn., Meeting, Westborough Country Club, St. Louis, Mo., July 13.
- American Association of Nurserymen, 91st Annual Convention, Palmer House, Chicago, Ill., July 16-20.
- West Virginia Nurserymen's Assn. Meeting, White Sulphur Springs, Aug. 3-4.
- Joint Convention and Trade Show, by Southern Nurserymen's Assn., Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi, and Arkansas Nurserymen's Assns., Jung Hotel, New Orleans, Aug. 7-10.
- Indiana Association of Nurserymen, Inc., Summer Meeting, Purdue University, West Lafayette, Aug. 8-11.
- Midwest Turf Field Days, Purdue University, West Lafayette, Ind., Aug. 15-16.
- Texas Assn. of Nurserymen, Annual Convention, Nursery and Garden Supply Show, Dallas Memorial Auditorium, Dallas, Aug. 21-24.
- Penna. Grassland Council, Materials Handling Field Day, John Rodgers (Plum Bottom) Farm, Belleville, Aug. 26.
- Hawaiian Turfgrass Management Conference, University of Hawaii, Honolulu, Aug. 25-26.
- International Shade Tree Conference, 42nd Annual Convention, Sheraton-Cleveland Hotel, Cleveland, Ohio, Aug. 28-Sept. 2.