

Green Valley Turf Company Integrates Both Production and Marketing in 400-Acre Farm

Vince Lombardi, Green Bay Packer football coach, has often been quoted as saying that nice guys can't win. But this certainly is not the case with J. R. "Rusty" Wilkins, manager of the Green Valley Turf Company at Littleton, Colo. He is both nice guy and winner.

A visit to this Rocky Mountain operation will prove the point. Rusty, who is manager and vice-president of the company, has developed a demand market for the more popular varieties of quality sod.

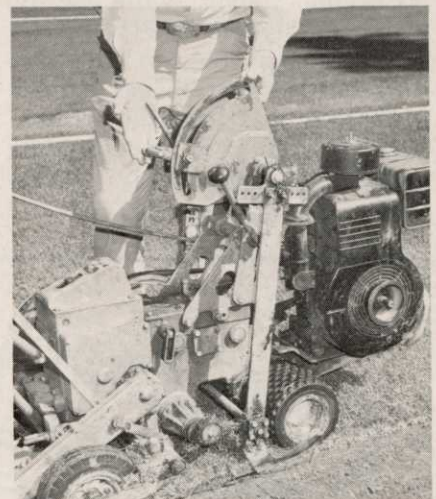
Green Valley specializes in Park, Merion, and Prato blue-grasses. Windsor and several varieties of specialty golf course sods are also grown. Sod sales to an ever-growing clientele include the home lawn, industrial, institutional, military, golf course, and highway department markets. Both wholesale and retail sales are made.

President of the company is K. C. Ensor, a Denver home builder. His need for sod, which prior to 1960 was largely un-



Once sod is palletted, fork lifts are used to quickly load trailer trucks. Loaded trucks are covered with a tarpaulin to protect sod from sun during transport. Tarp also helps hold sod rolls in place on pallets.

available in this area of the nation, led to development of the sod company. Before growing his own sod, Ensor was transporting sod some 700 miles from Iowa growers. Naturally, little was used in the area. Wilkins, son-in-law of Ensor and business graduate of Arizona State University, Tempe, Ariz., joined Ensor in the venture as farm manager and vice-president of the firm. Eddy Le Lea Ensor, daughter of Ensor, is secretary-



Specialty designed accessory helps maintain stability of cutting depth on cutter. Designed by Rusty Wilkins, it is transferred to new cutters as they are purchased.

treasurer of the firm and serves as office manager. She is responsible for much of the marketing effort of the company.

Past Marketing Experience Helpful In Selling Turf

Miss Ensor, who attended Stephens College, Columbia, Mo., and graduated from the University of Denver, finds sod marketing closely related to marketing and merchandising in other fields. Formerly, she worked as a buyer and in marketing for the Marshall Field Department Store, Chicago.

The Green Valley operation consists of 400 acres of cultivated

Green Valley Turf Company, Denver, Colo., management team: Miss Eddy Le Lea Ensor, seated, secretary-treasurer; Ken C. Ensor, president, center; and J. R. "Rusty" Wilkins, vice-president.





Turf buggy built from a used Volkswagen is used by Green Valley Turf Company to ride herd on the extensive irrigation system. Buggy can pass over aluminum pipe without damage, and at the same time eliminates compaction of new sod.



Sod is cross stacked on pallets after cutting and hand rolling. Wilkins reports little or no trouble has been experienced in movement of the sod rolls during transport.

sod. Wilkins uses a combination harvesting system. Sod is cut with a Ryan sod cutter, rolled by hand, loaded by hand on pallets, and then loaded on trucks by forklifts. To date, Wilkins has found this the most efficient system for his own particular operation. Labor, while not in great supply, is sufficiently available that he can hire the help needed to roll sod behind the cutter and load the pallets.

Normally, sod is cut and loaded out immediately. Three

laborers are used behind the sod cutter for rolling. They follow this operation by loading pallets. The cutter operator also fills in on loading pallets as he becomes free of the cutting operation. In addition, this man handles one of two forklifts in loading out trucks. During loading, the second forklift is handled by the truck driver.

Once a truck is loaded, the truck driver attaches his forklift to the truck and it is towed to the delivery site and used to

unload the freshly cut sod.

This system, Wilkins reports, makes efficient use of manpower. At the same time, the use of equipment designed to do the job keeps the number of harvesting man hours as low as possible. Right now, Wilkins and Ensor are investigating sod roller harvesting equipment to further reduce the hand labor requirement.

Green Valley sod is marketed in outlying areas as well as metropolitan Denver. Clientele



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Mowing is done twice weekly during summer season. Tony Nickerson, above, runs company's diesel-powered, 7-gang mower. A custom built rotary mower is used to mow under irrigation lines.

ranges from Boulder, Colo., which is 35 miles north, to Pueblo, more than 100 miles south. Mountain areas to the west are also served. To keep sod in as fresh a state as possible during transport, each load is covered tightly with a tarpaulin. This tarp also serves to hold sod rolls which are cross stacked in place on the pallets.

Lag Time From Seeding To Harvest 10-24 Months

New seedings are made after each harvest. Lag time between seeding and harvest ranges from 10 to 24 months, depending on the grass variety and season. Chemical fertilizers are used in combinations which are needed for best plant development. Irrigation at seasonal rates of more than 2 million gallons of water daily is from river bottom wells. Irrigation pipe of 1½" and 2" sizes are used. Wilkins says the system right now consists of 5500 heads of the 1½" size on as many pieces of pipe, and 2500 additional heads and 6000 pieces of pipe of the 2" size. Riding herd on this extensive system is aided by use of a "turf buggy", built from a used Volkswagen. Rainbird sprinklers are automatically sequenced by time-control valves.

During summer months, mowing is done twice weekly by a combination of flail mowers. Wilkins uses a diesel-powered 7-gang mower and a custom-built rotary mower. The latter

is equipped with shield over the turbo cones and used to mow under irrigation pipe.

Marketing is an integral phase of the Green Valley operation. Ensor, who has built and sold thousands of homes in the area and is still a progressive builder, has contributed his experience in business management to the operation. Eddy Le Lea Ensor also has previous marketing experience, and Wilkins is a personable and effective salesman. They sell both quality and service. Every purchaser of sod, whether retail or wholesale, is provided with information sheets and folders on care of sod after laying. Instructions for laying sod are also included for the homeowner who may be laying his own sod.

A sales piece which has proved helpful is a simple, 2-page, mimeographed cost comparison sheet. It gives itemized costs of seeding versus sodding. Besides costs, labor needed for each type of lawn is compared. Best sales point for the sodded lawn is the fact that the homeowner has a lawn immediately with sod, and is not faced with the 2- to 3-year time lag needed to develop an attractive lawn.

Outlook for the sod industry is favorable in the view of the Green Valley management team. The Ensors and Wilkins believe that the instant lawn idea will become even more popular and that demand for quality sod will continue to grow.



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