

System of Management Underway At Summit Hall To Protect Sod Root Zone and Eliminate Reseeding



Fully mechanized system of sod harvesting on Summit Hall Turf Farm, Inc., is designed to prevent soil compaction. John Nunes sod harvester, above, and International Harvester forklift are on flotation tires. Forklift moves palletted sod to trucks located on hard surfaced roads.

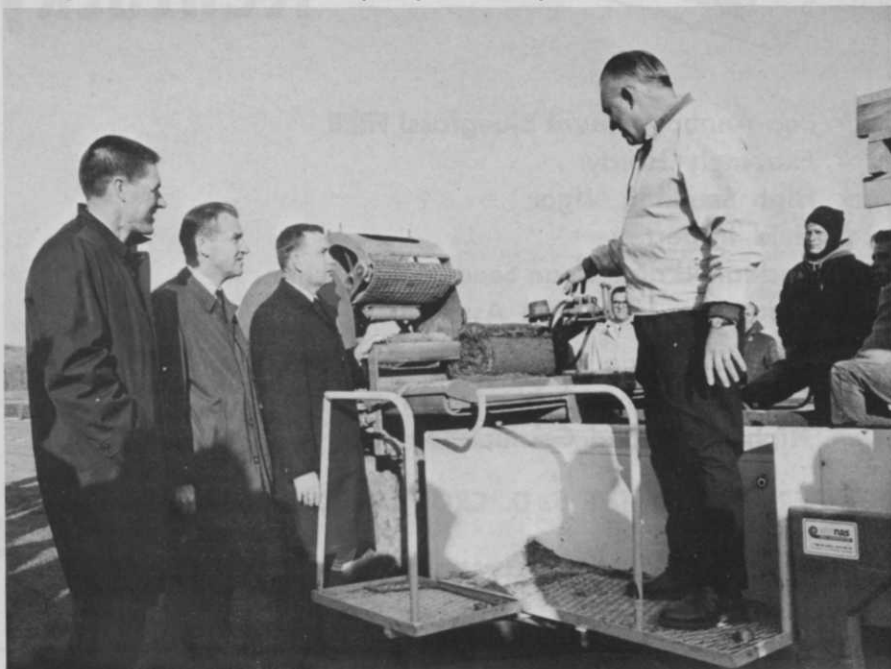
SOD PRODUCTION is a new industry. New methods of growing and handling sod can be expected. The same is true in selling the freshly harvested product. Good producers across the country are shaking down various methods of handling the product and moving it into wholesale and retail channels.

A veteran in the business, Bill Wilmot, founder and manager of Summit Hall Turf Farm, Inc., Gaithersburg, Md., is combining cultural and harvesting methods to cut overall management costs. He is also working to improve marketing practices.

His most recent project is development of a system of management which will eliminate reseeding after harvesting the sod crop. The fact that sod rhizomes below the surface, if not damaged by compaction, will recover and grow new sod as quickly as that established by a new seeding is the basis for his new system.

In the past, Wilmot says, trucks, tractors, and harvesting equipment in general have compacted rhizomes to the point

Bill Wilmot, Summit Hall founder and manager, explains rolling mechanism on Nunes harvester to American Society of Agronomy group which toured farm during recent national meeting. Harvester will handle 1200 square yards of sod per hour with crew of three men.



that too many do not recover, or that recovery is too slow. Today, flotation wheels for all types of equipment enable the operator who uses care in management to all but eliminate compaction.

Wilmot is using a John Nunes sod harvester equipped with high flotation wheels. He uses the harvester for rolling and palleting Merion sod. For Meyer Zoysia, he locks the rolling head out of the way on the harvester and uses it for padding sod. A new International Harvester forklift, also on high flotation wheels, is used to carry pallets from field to trucks on hard roads. The idea is to literally float the sod off the field and onto waiting trucks.

Wilmot is now tooled up and running the first trial with the system. He expects irrigation to be more critical, but has the equipment and controls in the form of a power roll system to handle the problem. Wilmot expects Meyer Zoysia to recover

within 18 months and about the same period for Merion bluegrass. This, of course, would vary in other regions where temperature ranges differ.

Big advantage of the system is the fact that the agricultural phases of reseeding are eliminated. However, Wilmot believes that some light overseeding and scarifying may be necessary. Another major plus which the system promises is that an entire field does not have to be cleaned up before grass recovery begins.

Most of the 300 acres in sod on the Summit Hall Turf Farm, River Farm, is in Merion bluegrass. In fact, Wilmot was one of the early producers of this variety. He supplied the first Merion which went into the East Garden of the White House lawn during the tenure of President Harry S. Truman. This was in the early 1950's.

Wilmot also grows a good percentage of Meyer Z-52 Zoysia.

In addition, he grows Scott's Windsor and will harvest his first 0217 Brand, Fylking Kentucky bluegrass this coming summer. He has high hopes for this latter variety, reporting that it looks very good right now.

For cutting sod ahead of the Nunes harvester, Wilmot uses Ryan sod cutters. The Ryan 18" unit is used for rolls, being mostly Merion. The 15" head is used when sod is folded, and the 12" head for padding Zoysia.

Marketing demands time and effort for Wilmot. He keys his efforts on a number of markets, most of which are in the Washington, D. C., and adjoining areas. In order to guarantee delivery of fresh sod, Wilmot says that sod is cut the morning of delivery and sales are restricted to distances of 200 miles. To do this, he has his crews on the job an hour earlier than formerly. They report in at 6:00 a.m. during the harvesting period.

Summit Hall turf is sold wholesale, retail, and by mail. In fact, the mail-order business for Zoysia plugs continues to be a thrifty one. Wholesale business is via landscapers and retail garden centers. This latter group, particularly the large, chain garden centers, have become big outlets for Summit Hall. Wilmot says the retail end of the business consists of two installation crews which are kept busy the entire season.

Important to the sod producing industry, Wilmot believes, is proper care of the newly laid sod. Since much is sold through outlets other than the farm, Summit Hall furnishes information leaflets on how to care for the new sod. A flyer is provided the buyer for each type of sod purchased. Wilmot has flyers for Zoysia and Merion sods and uses O. M. Scott and Son's Windsor folder when he sells Windsor. Every customer is furnished the proper folder, whether he is purchasing 10 yards or 1000 yards of sod.



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