



Bob Rapp, owner, left, and James (Jim) Walling, office manager, discuss current Rapp instant lawn orders.

## Sales Savvy Is Business Management Key For Sod Producers Across the Country

Selling sod is becoming the key factor in the success of growers across the country. Growing a quality product requires the best in cultural practices. But growers have this facet of the business pretty well worked out. Harvesting practices are still undergoing changes and methods vary. But the crux of success seems more and more to be the ability to sell, and to collect the cash for the delivered product.

A good example of maintaining and holding a firm market is the Rapp operation at Farmingdale, N. J. Owner-manager Bob Rapp believes their secret in marketing has been control of sod from the field to the site where it will be installed. After 5 years in the business, he is convinced that the producer who is able to control the sale of his

sod can better maintain his market.

As many growers contend, col-

lection from many borderline landscapers, primarily those who use the name but who are more

Princeton sod harvester is used on Rapp farms. Operating unit here is William Sachse. Harvester can handle up to 10,000 square feet per hour though Rapp finds men folding sod for pallet can handle only about 7000 square feet hourly on a day-long basis.





The Rapps tow a fork lift for unloading sod delivered at site. Bob Rapp, in picture, says that they have found this more practical than the boom which they have mounted on another Rapp truck. Forklift is used on local deliveries, up to 40 miles.

likely to be only part-time sod installers, can be a problem. Bob Rapp says they handle this problem by using a cash-on-delivery system. All Rapp sod is delivered on Rapp trucks and collection made before unloading.

Naturally this system of collection on the spot cannot be adhered to 100% of the time but works adequately for Rapp. He says established landscapers who regularly do business with the Rapp operation are handled on a regular billing basis. Others

must assure the office manager that the money will be on hand before the sod is lifted for delivery.

Rapp Instant Lawn farm grows about 200 acres of sod yearly on mineral soil. The demand is currently for Merion, Rapp states, and this variety constitutes the bulk of their production. Rapp finds the best time for lifting sod to be May 5 through September. He prefers to lift and market 2-year-old sod, which contrasts with the

preference of many growers, particularly those on peat or muck based soils who like to

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Loaded pallet from sod harvester is lowered and automatically slides into position on field to be picked up by forklift and loaded for transport. Employees are, left, Fran Hurley, and Oleboreo Miranda.

## MSU Tips on Sodding For Rapid Rooting

Michigan State University studies indicate there are several important guidelines to insure successful sodding results.

For most rapid sod rooting, MSU specialists point out that sod should be cut  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $\frac{3}{4}$ -in. thick. When laying sod, the underlying soil should be moist to give roots a better chance to establish themselves quickly and firmly.

MSU also recommends that soil for sodding be prepared just as it is for seeding. Avoid laying sod on a subsoil because grass does not readily take root in subsoil.



Fork lift, handled here by Charles Conrow, is used to pick up pallets behind harvest and load trucks for transport. The Rapps maintain two forklifts, one in the field and one which is towed behind a 10-wheel truck.

lift and market sod within a year after seeding.

A Princeton turf harvester is used along with forklifts to handle the palletted sod. Normal production from the harvester is about 7,000 square feet per hour, though the top capacity of the machine is somewhat greater. Two forklifts are needed, one in the field and one which is towed behind a 10-wheel delivery truck. Bob Rapp also uses two additional trucks which are tractor-trailers with mounted booms. These latter trucks are used for distant deliveries or those beyond 40 miles which is the practical limit for towing the fork lift.

Sod is sold to landscapers, garden centers, builders, developers, golf courses, and a few sales direct to homeowners. Rapp says the operation is equipped so that they can operate with only 8 men. This permits them to keep better quality labor, he believes, and to run a more efficient operation. Sod is generally harvested in the morning, and then can be delivered during the remainder of the day.

Seasonal variations have proved a problem to Rapp and other growers in New Jersey and surrounding states. Two years ago, the weather was so dry that one inch of irrigation water disappeared into the soil almost immediately. Rapp uses a portable irrigation system with Marlowe pump. By contrast, the next year was wet to the point that they found it difficult to lift and deliver sod.

Rapp found that the biggest boost to their marketing program proved to be a 4-color promotion folder. A professional photographer was hired to shoot both field and home site pictures and a folder planned to point up the value and beauty of the Rapp instant lawn. These promotion pieces were sent to landscapers, garden center outlets, builders, developers, golf course superintendents, and others who were prospective sod purchasers. This, Rapp said, put their product on the market and helped establish them in the industry. They believe it the single most important step beyond production of a quality product.

## Turf Becomes Big Business For Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania Crop Reporting Service reveals that \$231,353,328 is spent each year on maintenance of turfgrass areas in Pennsylvania.

Areas surveyed by the Service included home lawns, schools, sod growers, golf courses, airports, athletic fields, cemeteries, churches, apartments, motel and hotels, parks, state highways, and the Pennsylvania Turnpike.

The 231 million dollar turfgrass expenditure includes \$66,557,307 value for unpaid family labor on 2,250,309 home lawns. Replacement value of turfgrass equipment in the state is \$333,908,568.

L. H. Bull, Secretary of Agriculture for the Commonwealth says that this makes turfgrass the largest single agricultural enterprise in the state. It was equal to 63 percent of the total cash receipts from the sale of all agricultural products for 1966.