



Leonard DeLalio, Long Island, N.Y., checks weed-free crop of sod.

Quality Sod Produces

Ready Market For Long Island Grower

Leonard DeLalio is a businessman in an enviable position — he has no trouble selling every bit of the product he makes, and he doesn't even have to advertise it.

DeLalio grows sod on New York's Long Island. He has about 550 acres of mostly Merion and Windsor in three locations — 50 acres near his Farmingdale headquarters, 250 in Eastport and the rest in Shoreham.

"I've farmed around here for many years," DeLalio explains, "growing mostly corn and potatoes. But the area's high taxation, growing population density and high-priced labor market forced me to switch over to a single, higher-profit crop. Now I figure a one-crop business is just a lot less headaches."

"Actually," DeLalio continues, "we're in four businesses at once. We grow the sod, sell it, truck it,

and then have to collect for it. Believe it or not, that last job is often the toughest, since we deal with many small nurserymen and gardeners." Other, larger customers include builders, landscapers, etc. DeLalio's crews do no installation — they simply deliver the sod to the installer.

With the Long Island suburban population still exploding, DeLalio has been expanding his production about 10 percent a year, but has decided to slow down expansion at this point for numerous reasons.

Stable Price

"One thing we want to do is keep the price as stable as we can," he explains, "and up to now we've been able to do this by introducing labor-saving techniques like our mechanized harvesters, palletized handling, automatic truckloading and unload-

ing, etc. "But," he adds, "and you can quote me on this — we expect a price increase will be necessary, at least by the spring of 1969. We just can't keep pace with the cost of materials, labor and machinery."

Just because he can sell every bit of sod he produces, DeLalio cautions, doesn't mean all is rosy. He has problems just like every farmer has. He has weather to contend with, as well as weeds, bugs, fungus and other plant diseases.

In addition, he has to provide various grass mixtures during certain weather conditions, for various soil types, and other varying situations. "The quality grower must keep various types of sod available at all times," he says. "Therefore, we have to keep large areas shaped up and ready to go all the time."

And shaped up they are, because DeLalio's philosophy is

never to sell anything but top-quality certified weed-free and healthy sod. One way he assures this is a constant program of fertilization, weed and disease control.

Ureaform Used

"We've been going to more expensive fertilizers that are slower releasing, and are leaning toward the chemical organics rather than the natural organics," he says. "Ureaform, for example, is giving us the more controlled response we need in turf, for a uniform product."

As to weed control, DeLalio feels a lot of his weed problems like henbit, shepherd's purse and dandelion are seed-borne, and is trying to buy weed-free seed to prevent these. Other weeds he runs up against are barnyardgrass, corngrass, and crabgrass. "You find these cropping up especially in old potato fields," he says.

"We watch the turf for weed seed production at about four to five months' growth," he says. "If there is seed production, we apply Dacthal preemergence herbicide at 12 to 12½ lbs. an acre early in the spring. The parent annual weeds will have died out over the winter, and Dacthal prevents the weed seeds from sprouting, so what we have produced is an essentially weed-free sod."

"We've had good control and never any injury to the grass from the Dacthal," DeLalio says.

The sod, which is late summer or fall seeded, is usually sold the second year following, when it is 18 to 20 months old.

"We don't often have enough of a broadleaf weed problem to require a post-emergence spray," DeLalio says, "but we do use various postemergences including 2,4-D, 2,4,5-TP and others to control dog fennel, dandelion and henbit, as well as MCP for knotweed control, as they are needed.

A high-pressure potato sprayer with a 25 to 40-foot boom is used

to apply these sprays, as well as the Dacthal.

"We fight sod webworm, aphids, flea beetles with wettable powder pesticides wherever possible," DeLalio says. "Oil-based materials can injure grass." Among the materials he uses are DDP and Sevin, Diazanone for chinchbugs and chlordane for grubs.

"The only reason we haven't used more fungicides is because of their high cost," DeLalio says. "We've used Daconil 2787 on Windsor grass for leafspot, and various other fungicides for other diseases, but we are only in the beginning stages of an effective, economical fungus-control program.

Irrigation A Must

An integral part of his quality turf program is his irrigation system. "We irrigate every bit of our sod," DeLalio says, "with our seven deep-well turbine pump systems." Each system provides from 450 to 1000 gallons of water an hour.

If all this coddling of sod sounds costly, DeLalio admits it may be, but it's also necessary to being able to guarantee a top-quality sod, which is what is being demanded by Long Island buyers. "The chemicals alone can run 10-12 percent of the total cost of production," DeLalio says.

But it must be worth it to his customers, if he has no trouble selling every square foot he can produce!

30 Common Weeds Pictured On West Chemical Chart

West Chemical Products, Inc. recently published a new weed identification chart that features illustrations of 30 of the most common weeds plaguing American grass growers. Printed on heavy paper, the chart can be mounted on the wall for ready reference.

West recommends the use of Assault — a concentrated herbi-

cide manufactured by the firm—for eradicating the weeds. A non-selective weed killer that also serves as a soil sterilant, Assault can be used wherever plant growth causes obstructions or fire or safety hazards — including drainage ditches, power rights-of-way, airports and parking lots — according to West. For your free chart write Dept. KE, West Chemical Products, Inc., 42-16 West St., Long Island City, N.Y. 11101.

IH Man Predicts Good Year For Tractor Sales In 1969

Ben H. Warren, general manager, International Harvester Company's Farm Equipment Division, sees 1969 as a good year for producers of farm, light-industrial and lawn and garden tractors and equipment.

He predicts a continuing increase in the sales of light-industrial tractors — perhaps as much as 10 per cent over 1968. A major factor in this optimism is the expected rise in housing starts, Warren explains. Demand will also be high for lawn and garden tractors in the 7 h.p. and over class, with sales well exceeding the 1968 total of 250,000 units. Sales of riding mowers of the 6 h.p. IH Cadet 60 type will also increase, he says.

Vargas Heads Turfgrass Disease Research At MSU

Dr. Joseph M. Vargas, Jr. has recently been named head of turfgrass disease research at Michigan State University. He has been appointed to MSU's Department of Botany and Plant Pathology.

A native of New England, Dr. Vargas was awarded his B.S. from the University of Rhode Island, his M.S. from Oklahoma State University and his Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota. He has worked in the area of turfgrass pathology throughout his undergraduate and graduate education.