



Frank Cacavio is general manager of this pioneering business that began with its founder delivering sod to New York City more than 40 years ago.

ANYTHING that saves time, labor or effort finds a very welcome reception at Mercer Sod, Inc. A family owned sod-growing business, Mercer has its business offices in Trenton, N. J., and its 500-acre farm in Mt. Holly, N. J.

Considered to be a pioneer in the sod growing industry, the business dates back to 1928 when it was founded by Mr. Cacavio who hauled field sod into New York City for landscaping, cemeteries and building grounds.

During the years, the elder Cacavio was assisted by his four sons as they came out of school. When the elder Cacavio retired, the four sons took over active management of the business. Under their guidance, Mercer Sod has become a leading

... Since 1928

By PHIL LANCE
Philadelphia, Pa.

grower of sod in the state of New Jersey—winning the 1968 Soil Conservation Award as proof of progressive attitude.

"You can only take out what you put in, and we try to put in the best," says Frank J. Cacavio, Mercer's general manager. "This goes for everything. We only buy the best seed and equipment that will help us raise the best sod.

"This helped us to build our reputation for cultivated sod; not the regular field-grown sod but sod that

the best technology can raise. As a result, we have earned an enviable reputation for quality sod and service.

"From a 138-acre start, we now cultivate more than 500 acres. We intend to farm more. By moving in the slow but sure direction, our growth has been a steady and successful one."

With the exception of 10 acres of Penncross and 10 acres of Fylking bluegrass, the entire acreage is about evenly divided between New Jersey certified Merion, Merion mix and Kentucky Fescue. The certified Merion is under the constant supervision of the New Jersey Department of Agriculture.

Quick Action on Weeds

The seed is laboratory tested, the fields checked before, during and after cutting. Effective control of poa annua, bent and other objectionable weeds are under continuous supervision.

"We have our share of problems with broad leaf, dandelions and dog fennel as do other sod growers," says Cacavio. "However, we are able to control the growth of these weeds."

"As soon as any sign of these



A sub-soiler is used to counteract compaction of heavy equipment.



Broadcasting of corn is about to begin. When the corn is three feet high, it will be plowed under and the ground seeded to grass.

weeds develop, we spray with a mixture of one quart of 2,4-D and a half pint of Banvel D with 200 gallons of water. We spray an acre with this solution.

"The tank on our John Bean sprayer has been calibrated to cover 11 acres. We have been highly successful in controlling this problem with this application."

Seeding starts as early as weather permits, with cultivation and harvesting continuing until the last day that weather permits. Harvested sod is from 18 months to 2 years old and is cut in $\frac{3}{4}$ inch thickness. About 20 persons are employed.

Landscaping Part of Business

Mercer Sod, Inc., is one part of the business. Mercer Contracting is another. The latter concerns itself with landscaping. Dominic P. and Victor J. Cacavio are in charge of sales. Jim is in charge of administration and Frank is the General Manager. Each brother specializes in his own area. However, activities are interrelated so that there is continuing supervision and management through all levels of the business.

"We are firm believers in equipment that will help us do a job better and faster," says the general manager. "We have equipped our trucks, for example, with Side-O-Matic mechanical unloaders. This has saved us considerable time and labor.

"We have recently installed four

soil irrigation pumps and have installed more than 6,000 square feet of underground mains. This has eliminated considerable hand labor. We have a number of Nunes sod harvesters, which has eliminated hand picking.

"Our fields have been designed to collect rainfall water into our ponds. We have four that are about 400 feet by 80 feet by 20 feet deep."

To complete the irrigation of the farms, there are two 1,700-foot wells.

Sod growing equipment includes John Bean sprayers, Massey Ferguson and International Harvester tractors, Massey Ferguson disk harrows, John Bean roll harrows, Massey Ferguson plows, Everson's land levelers, Ryan sod cutters and Nunes harvesters, and Ryan sod lifters.

Mercer Sod has its own maintenance shop and all equipment is traded in on a four- to five-year

basis. It also has three Massey Ferguson and Ford fork lifts.

Fields are disk-harrowed after the removal of sod. Then a roller harrow moves over the field and 500 pounds of 10-10-10 fertilizer is spread over each acre. Three bushels of corn are broadcast over each acre. When the corn is three feet high, it's plowed under to introduce organic material into the sod. A John Deere sub-soiler runs two feet under the surface to break loose compaction created by the heavy equipment.

Soil analysis is used to determine the proper recommendations for fertilization.

Record-Keeping Vital

Cacavio is a stickler for accurate records. A map designates the entire Mercer Sod farm. The entire farm is sectionalized numerically.

Every operation that takes place in any field is immediately recorded. Whether it is seeded, fertilized, watered or harvested, the date that the activity took place, what the activity was and further remarks are noted for the particular field.

"We have our finger on the pulse of our entire 500-acre farm," says Cacavio. "We know when and what has taken place on every acre. By maintaining accurate records, we can keep pace with our cultivation program. We don't believe in any guess work. We know what we are doing and we do it. This is the reason for our quality sod and productivity."

A former president of the New Jersey Sod Grower's Association and a member of the American Sod Producers Association, Cacavio is quite optimistic about the future.

He feels that there is a greater need for cooperation between sod growers if improved legislation and ethics in competition are to be maintained. He feels there is a tremendous future for sod growers; and through a more cooperative spirit and technological advantages, greater financial gains can be enjoyed.

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