

# WTT Surveys Costs Of Golf Course Upkeep

It's an immensely expensive task to provide the entertainment of golfing — which probably comes as a surprise to nearly everyone but those involved with course maintenance.

Questions of how expensive and what constitutes the expense were answered this summer in a golf industry survey conducted by this magazine. A computer random sampling of the more than 6,000 golf course readers of WEEDS TREES and TURF provided the inside look on golf course maintenance costs.

Eighteen-hole courses constituted nearly two-thirds of the courses reporting. Their maintenance budgets average \$65,123. The nine-hole courses averaged \$27,550. Three 27-hole courses averaged \$111,666 and three 36-hole courses, \$143,666.

As could be expected, labor accounted for more than half (56.8%) of the budget. About 11% went for equipment, 7% for fertilizer, and 4.4% for chemicals.

A significant cost break is evident between the nine- and 18-hole courses, apparently reflecting more professional management and upkeep for the latter. Fertilizer, chemical, labor and equipment expenditures for 18-hole courses were three and four times greater than for the nine-hole courses.

A considerable difference in total maintenance budget was discovered for 18-hole courses. Budgets varied from \$25,000 to more than \$100,000 (See Table I).

Average expenditures for chemicals were \$703 for nine holes; \$3,009 for 18 holes; \$5,600 for 27 holes; and \$5,166 for 36 holes.

The mean average dollar expenditure for chemicals for the 128 superintendents reporting these figures was \$2,470 annually.

Fertilizer expenditures for the 128 courses reporting average higher, at \$3,986. Nine-hole courses averaged \$1,097; 18-hole, \$4,753; 27-hole, \$8,983; and 36-hole, \$8,666.

Table 2 shows how the fertilizer and chemical budget was spent.

An inconsistency developed in expenditures for equipment. The three 36-hole courses reporting figures averaged \$13,666, while the three 27-hole courses spent an average of

\$20,750. Averages dropped considerably for 18 holes — \$6,862 — and for nine holes — \$2,232.

Average dollar expenditure for new and replacement equipment for the 124 superintendents reporting figures was \$6,286.

Equipment inventory for the average course looks like this: one aerator, one earth auger, one dozer, two granular chemical applicators, one liquid chemical applicator, two turf combs, one disk cultivator, one field drill, one fumigant applicator, one grader, one turf blower, one leveler, one backpack mistblower, one truck-mounted mist blower, 13 mowers (one flail, three gang, six reel, two rotary and one sickle bar), one dethatcher, one soil proportioning system, one chain saw, one soil shredder, one sod cutter, two seeders, two sod pluggers, 11 sprayers (one boom, one bifluid two cart or wheel-barrow type, one compressed air, three hose end, two

knapsack, and one mobile turf), three tractors, 16 electric carts, eight gasoline carts and one vertical turf slitter.

Private courses accounted for 41.3% of the total; public, 34%; and semi-private, 24.7%. Nearly a third of the courses were on acreages between 101 and 150 acres. Better than 20% were between 50 and 100 acres; another 20% between 151 and 200 acres.

The average labor expenditure of \$32,236 went for five year-around employees and six part-time employees. Only 16% of the courses reported that uniforms are required for employees, but in 96% of these instances the club paid for them.

Watering systems look like this: Greens — 70% are hose and/or quick coupler, 6% sod cup, and 24% automatic; tees — 82.5% are hose and/or quick coupler, and 17.5% automatic; fairways — 82.2% hose and/or quick coupler and 17.8% automatic.

Irrigation water came primarily from wells, lakes, or city supply sources. Nearly 32% of the superintendents reported they tested water before using it on the courses. Water pressure for most courses was from 70 to 150 lbs./sq. in.

TABLE I. GOLF COURSE BUDGETS

| Budget             | Number Reporting |          |          |          |        | Percent** |
|--------------------|------------------|----------|----------|----------|--------|-----------|
|                    | 9 holes          | 18 holes | 27 holes | 36 holes | Other* |           |
| Less than \$10,000 | 6                |          |          |          |        | 4.4%      |
| \$10,000-\$24,900  | 7                |          |          |          |        | 5.2%      |
| \$25,000-\$34,900  | 16               | 14       |          |          |        | 22.5%     |
| \$35,000-\$49,900  | 7                | 8        |          |          |        | 11.0%     |
| \$50,000-\$74,900  | 3                | 25       |          |          |        | 20.9%     |
| \$75,000-\$99,900  | 1                | 21       | 1        |          | 1      | 18.0%     |
| \$100,000 or more  |                  | 19       | 2        | 3        |        | 18.0%     |
| Total              | 40               | 87       | 3        | 3        | 1      | 100.0%    |

\* A 27 hole course plus seven practice holes.

\*\*Based on average budgets of courses in each budget category as reported by 134 respondents answering the question.

TABLE II. FERTILIZER AND CHEMICAL 1969 EXPENDITURES

|   | Number Users Reporting | Total 1969 Expenditures | Average Per User Reporting |
|---|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| Fertilizer                              | 111                    | \$322,914               | \$2909                     |
| Broad-leaf weedkillers (Post-emergence) | 95                     | 35,064                  | 369                        |
| Post-emergence crabgrass/poa herbicides | 47                     | 13,806                  | 298                        |
| Pre-emergence crabgrass/poa herbicides  | 47                     | 23,478                  | 500                        |
| Fungicides                              | 97                     | 111,940                 | 1154                       |
| Growth retardants                       | 13                     | 2,675                   | 206                        |
| Insecticides                            | 82                     | 24,710                  | 301                        |
| Soil amendments                         | 34                     | 13,855                  | 408                        |
| Wetting agents                          | 41                     | 11,611                  | 283                        |
| Turf dyes/colorants                     | 18                     | 1,580                   | 88                         |
| Soil fumigants                          | 14                     | 4,705                   | 336                        |
| Peat moss                               | 24                     | 7,865                   | 328                        |

\* Based on the number of respondents who answered each segment of this question; a total of 150 golf course superintendents returned questionnaires.