

## WEEDS TREES and TURF<sup>®</sup>

### SECOND NATIONAL SOD INDUSTRY SURVEY

**C**ULTIVATED SOD continues to be a growing business. During the past two seasons the field or wholesale value of the crop has grown by an estimated \$25 million. Growers are increasing in number. At the same time there appears to be less pasture sod business. In fact, this latter phase of the "instant lawn" is seldom a factor in the industry.

These and other facts about the sod industry result from a comprehensive study of the industry by WEEDS TREES AND TURF magazine members. This study is the successor to a survey done two seasons earlier. This magazine study, as was true with the first one, has been made with the help of officials

of the American Sod Producers Association. It pinpoints the number of U.S. cultivated sod farms at about 938.

WTT's circulation list includes about 1,250 readers who categorize themselves as sod growers. These include a number of larger farms where foremen and partners also receive the magazine. By being closely associated with this industry and personally acquainted with many growers, the editors of WTT have been able to determine where most duplications lie, thus the ability to fairly accurately pinpoint the number of producers.

Table 1 shows the response to the study. Every third sod producer on the WTT circulation list was sent a questionnaire during May, 1970. Almost a quarter of the 414 recipients returned information. Results are based on 99 surveys returned during the first three weeks. Since the cut-off date some half dozen or more

**Table 1. Results of survey among sod producers on WEEDS TREES AND TURF circulation lists.**

Survey Questionnaires Mailed*	414
Questionnaires Returned	99
Returns	23.9%

\* Only Owner-Operators Asked To Complete Survey Questions

**Table 2. Report of growers on the number of acres of cultivated sod produced yearly in the United States.**

Question: How many acres of sod do you have under cultivation?

Answers: 99

Total Acreage: 21,881

Average Acreage Per Farm: 221 acres

Projected (938 growers): 217,298 acres

**Table 3. Report of growers on the number of acres of sod marketed yearly in the United States.**

Question: How many acres of sod do you market each year?

Answers: 95

Total Acres Marketed: 10,360

Average Acreage Per Farm: 109 acres

Projected (938 growers): 102,242 acres

**Table 4. Average number of years experience in growing among U.S. growers.**

Question: How many years have you been growing sod?

Answers: 89

Average: 9.4 years per grower

**Table 5. Size of sod farms as reported by U.S. growers.**

Size of Operation	Number		Percent
	Reporting	Projected*	
Acreage			
500 or more	12	114	12.1
300-499	13	123	13.1
100-299	25	237	25.2
50-99	17	161	17.2
25-49	14	133	14.2
Less than 25	18	170	18.2
Totals	99	938	100.0%

\* Based on 938 growers

**Table 6. Varieties of cultivated sod now being grown in the U. S.**

Question: What varieties of sod do you produce?

Variety	Answers	Acreage*	Percent of Crop
Merion	61	9,046	47.9
Common Ky.	30	3,303	17.5
Fylking	19	525	2.8
Bermuda Blends	11	425	2.5
Miscellaneous Blends	10	1,140	6.0
Park	10	750	3.9
Windsor	9	309	1.6
Emerald Zoysia	9	143	0.8
Newport	7	114	0.6
Tifton 328	5	54	0.3
Ky. Fescue	5	338	1.8
Bents	5	119	0.6
St. Augustine	5	436	2.3
Fescue	4	144	0.8
Prato	4	131	0.7
Tifton 419	4	15	0.1
Delta-Merion Mix	3	60	0.3
Warrens (A-34, 20, 10)	3	715	3.7
Tif-Dwarf	3	8	0.1
Centipede	3	171	0.9
Merion-Ky. Mix	3	372	1.9
Pennlawn-Merion Mix	2	55	0.3
Delta	2	27	0.1
Other**	18	484	2.5
Totals	235	18,884	100.0%

\* Reported by Variety.

\*\* Included one grower of each of the following: Chewing Fescue, Merion-Pennlawn-Delta, Tif-Green, Arboretum, Tifway, Windsor-Merion, Bitter Blue, Argentine Bahia, Merion-Fescue, Fylking-Fescue, FB 137, Dichondra, Pee Dee, Sun Turf, Tif-way Dwarf, Ky. Red Creeping Fescue, Field.

**Table 7. Methods of handling sod as reported by growers.**

Question: How do you handle sod?

	Number Reporting	Percent
Rolled and loaded by hand	44	44.4
Rolls on pallets	30	33.3
Folded on pallets	21	21.2
Rolled and loaded by elevator	14	14.1
*Other	6	6.6
Totals	115	119.6%

\* slabbed on pallets; cut and hand load; uncut and contracted.

**Table 8. Grower response as to where sod is delivered.**

Question: Do you deliver to point of sale?  
4 yes — 4.3% of growers

Do you sell for pick-up at field?  
8 yes — 8.7% of growers

Both Practices — 80 yes — 87% of growers

**Table 9. Report of growers on purchasers of cultivated sod in the U.S.**

Question: Where do you market sod?

Answers: 95

	Answers	Percent of Crop Sold
Landscapers .....	81	47.2
Direct to		
Homeowners .....	78	23.7
Garden Centers .....	39	9.2
Industry .....	36	6.1
Golf Courses .....	78	3.5
Other Sod Growers		
For Resale .....	14	3.0
*Other .....	22	7.3
<b>Totals .....</b>	<b>348</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

\* state and city governments; retail sod haulers and truckers; general contractors, builders and developers; cemeteries; schools; parks; utilities.

**Table 10. Number of salesmen employed by sod producers in marketing their cultivated sod.**

Question: Do you employ salesmen?

Answers: 16 yes 80 no

Percent using salesmen: 16.6%

Total Salesmen employed: 29

Projected (total salesmen, 938 growers): 281

**Table 11. Types of advertising used by growers in developing a market for cultivated sod.**

Question: Do you do any advertising besides personal contact?

Answers: 73 yes 24 no

Types of advertising	No. answers	Percent
Yellow Pages .....	57	58.7
Newspapers .....	46	47.4
Direct Mail .....	27	27.8
Magazines .....	11	11.3
Radio .....	8	8.3
Television .....	3	3.0
*Other .....	5	5.0
<b>Totals .....</b>	<b>157</b>	<b>161.5%</b>

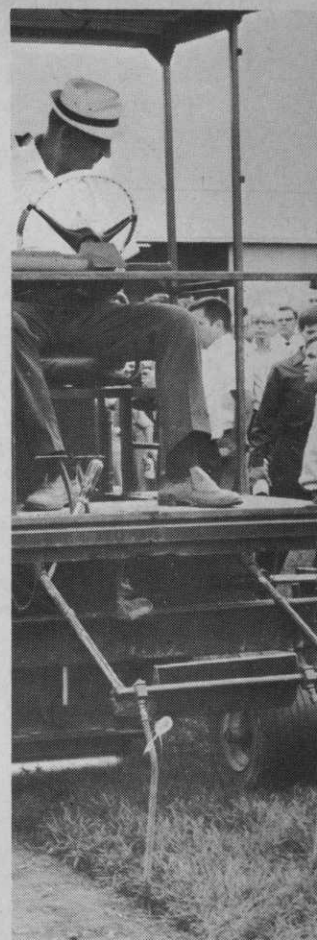
have been returned. These latter returns are not included in the tabulation.

The sod business is increasing in two ways. Original growers are producing and selling more acres of sod. Secondly, new growers are entering the business. Sod farm acreage has grown to 221 acres, up from just under 180 acres two years earlier. Based on 938 growers, this means the nation is now producing a total of 217,298 acres. (Table 2).

Sod acreage sold for the "instant lawn" market is also on the increase. Growers report selling an average of 109 acres per farm, for a U.S. total of 102,242 acres. This is up from a per farm average of 95 acres two seasons earlier. Estimated total acreage sold in the earlier study was only about 75,000.

Other tables showed little real change in the sod industry. More larger farms are in evidence and growers are turning more and more to mechanical labor-saving equipment. They are using slightly more salesmen and doing more public relations and advertising. These latter steps are increasing far more slowly, however, than the acceptance of the "instant lawn" idea would seem to warrant. Biggest changes are found in the varieties, blends and general mixes being produced. Growing of blends has become almost universal with growers zeroing in on the likes and dislikes of consumers. More sod mixes are being used to better adapt the grass to the climatic area where it will be utilized.

Business outlook among growers is very optimistic. A whopping 42.6% said business was up the previous year and another 49.5% expect it to be even better the next season. The forecast among growers themselves indicates that a strong market will likely continue in the sod industry for the foreseeable future.



**Table 12. Methods employed by growers to improve efficiency in handling and marketing sod.**

Question: What steps have you taken to improve efficiency?

	Number Reporting	Percent
New Equipment .....	84	84.6
Irrigated .....	33	33.3
Changed Varieties .....	28	28.3
Advertised .....	24	24.2
*Other .....	3	3.3
<b>Totals .....</b>	<b>168</b>	<b>173.7%</b>

\* added labor; bought acreage close to market; quit hiring migrants.

**Table 13. Major problems of sod growers in producing and marketing cultivated sod.**

Question: What do you consider the major obstacles for growers in sod production and marketing?

	Number Reporting	Percent
Labor (cost, shortage, turnover) .....	67	67.7
Price (low, high, pricecutting, greediness, control) .....	48	48.9
Consumer Education .....	29	29.3
Over production .....	13	13.1
Collecting .....	10	10.1
*Others .....	12	12.1
<b>Totals .....</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>181.2%</b>

\* climate, competition, distance from market, distribution, drought, equipment, poor financial management, qualified personnel, quality control

**Table 14. Report of growers on the 1969 sod production business.**

Question: How was your business in 1969?

	Number Reporting	Percent
Increased .....	40	42.6
Stayed about the same .....	33	35.1
Decreased .....	21	22.3
<b>Totals .....</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**Table 15. Business outlook of growers for 1970.**

Question: What do you expect businesswise for 1970?

	Number Reporting	Percent
Better year .....	46	49.5
About the same .....	40	43.0
Worse than '69 .....	7	7.5
<b>Totals .....</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

