

## Maryland's Sod Industry Seeks State Assistance

Maryland's turf and sod industry, one of the state's newest and fastest growing agri-businesses, is actively seeking more technical and marketing assistance from state government.

At a joint meeting the industry-wide Maryland Turf Grass Council and the sod growers' organization, the Maryland Turf Grass Association, requested the support of various state officials, including Comptroller Louis R. Goldstein, Senator Howard J. Clark (D. Howard), Secretary of Agriculture young D. Hance and University of Maryland Vice President Frank Bentz.

The turf industry is requesting the addition of two specialists for the agronomy department of the University, which now has just one such specialist and no funds to employ more. Industry leaders pointed out that while Maryland produces more commercial sod than the states of Virginia, Pennsylvania and New Jersey combined, those states have the services of eleven turf agronomists.

Industry leaders also requested representation of the Maryland Agricultural Commission, the state agriculture agency's advisory body which is made up of commodity group members representative of the state's agricultural segments, and which has not yet had a member representing the commercial turf and sod industry.

Another request related to crop reporting, a function of the Maryland-Delaware Crop Reporting Service, which serves USDA and the Maryland Department of Agriculture. The turf people complain that their product ranks among the state's major crops, along with corn, wheat, soybeans and tobacco. Yet, it is not included in reports on pro-

duction, dollar value, etc.

Addressing the industry meeting, Dr. John R. Hall, the University's only turf agronomist, estimated that there are now about 250,000 acres of turf being maintained in the form of lawns, golf courses, roadway strips and shoulders, parks, etc. and that it costs \$80,000,000 per year all told to maintain.

The state's commercial sod growers now have about 13,000 acres of grass under cultivation. This "crop", according to Hall, has a potential market value, when installed at consumers sites, of an estimated \$43,000,000. The state's largest producers of sod are Montgomery, Carroll, Harford and Howard Counties. However, sod is also produced in other counties, including Anne Arundel, Caroline, Queen Anne, Prince George, Washington and Allegany.

Hall estimates that it costs about \$3,279 to purchase, transport and lay an acre of sod.

Sod is used in large quantities by golf course operators, apartment house owners, industrial plants, schools, hospitals and private institutions, as well as by homeowners. The recent housing construction slow-down has created a slump in sod sales. Industry leaders, however, believe that this is just a temporary situation. They are optimistic about the future, as homeowners discover that a sod lawn often proves far more satisfactory and sometimes more economical than preparing a new lawn from seed, or trying to revive an old, weed-infested yard.

Commenting on the meeting, Secretary Hance said that state officials are most sympathetic to the needs of the industry.



Edward Croft (above), an associate of the O. M. Scott & Sons Company for 50 years, was fatally injured in a farm accident June 3 near his home in Salem, Oregon. Croft started with Scotts in 1924 and over the past 50 years has worked in essentially all areas in the operation. Croft started Scott's first contract seed production program with growers in Washington in 1960, and gradually expanded contract seed production to areas of Oregon.



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