

SOD PRODUCERS PLANT FEWER ACRES IN 1978

Approximately 1,200 companies grow \$225 million worth of sod each year according to a survey of 144 sod producers by Weeds Trees & Turf.

In the process, sod producers spend \$6.6 million for seed, \$15 million for fertilizer, and \$3.9 million on chemicals each year.

More than 700 U.S. sod producers were mailed questionnaires for this survey. Twenty percent returned them.

The universe of 1,200 sod companies was derived from input by the American Sod Producers Association and suppliers. Those considered actual sod farmers either have sod production as a primary source of revenue or farm a significant amount of sod acreage. Significant in this case would be more than 20 acres. Many nurseries grow a few acres of sod as a sideline to wholesale or retail business. For this survey, such nurseries were not included.

A value of \$1,500 per acre of sod produced was used to calculate gross revenue. This figure is a moderate estimate based upon data from Maryland (see article page 33). Value per acre has been reported as high as \$2,200 and as low as \$1,300.

The average sod farm is 290 acres from which 112 acres of sod was sold in 1977 at a value of \$168,000. Using median figures, the typical sod farm is 150 acres from which 70 acres was harvested in 1977 at a value of \$105,000. A few sod farms in the 800 to 1,500 acre range inflated the average. The average staff is six full-time and seven part-time employees.

According to these figures, sod growers harvest between a third and a half of their acreage annually. They expect to sell between 10 and 15 percent more acreage in 1978 than in 1977. However, respondents planted 15 percent less acreage in 1978. Perhaps this is in response to a predicted downturn in building starts.

Landscape contractors are the largest purchasers of sod, followed by homeowners and builders. Nearly two-thirds of sod growers sell to retail nurseries and 56 percent sell to wholesale nurseries. Athletic fields (58 percent) and golf courses (51 percent) are major buyers of sod.

Sod growers indicated that Tifway is the most common bermudagrass for sod, Pennncross is the most common bentgrass, Pennlawn is the most common fescue, Manhattan is the most common ryegrass, Floratam is the most common St. Augustine grass, and Meyer Z-52 is the most common Zoysia.

Bluegrass, of course, is the dominant type of sod produced. Baron ranked number one with 47 percent of the growers. Merion still places strongly in second (27 percent), Fylk-

ing third (26 percent), Glade fourth (25 percent), and Adelphi fifth (23 percent). The Maryland article in this issue points out that most sod today contains mixes and blends of varieties. The amount of single variety sod grown has dropped dramatically in the last ten years.

The average sod grower spends approximately \$30,000 annually for seed, fertilizer and chemicals. Using the average acreage of 290, the average material cost per acre is \$103. The largest part of this cost is fertil-

Annual expenditures projected for 1,200 sod producers.

	%	Range	Median	Mean	Projection
Fertilizer	87	\$ 75-\$140,000	\$7,000	\$14,465	\$15,000,000
Fungicide	25	\$100-\$ 27,000	\$ 500	\$ 2,198	\$ 660,000
Herbicide	74	\$ 20-\$ 35,000	\$2,000	\$ 3,604	\$ 3,200,000
Seed	58	\$250-\$ 85,000	\$6,000	\$ 9,505	\$ 6,600,000

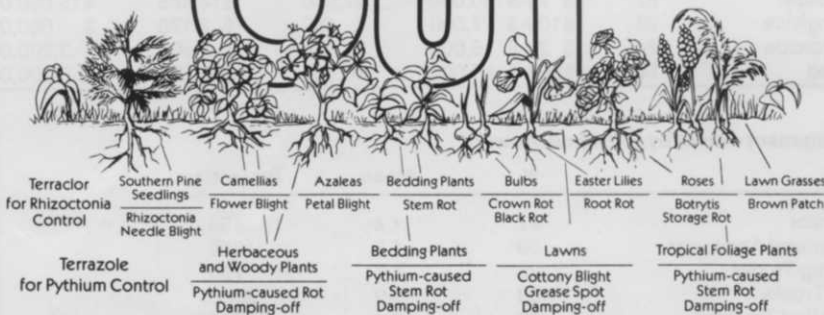
Equipment owned by 1,200 sod growers.

	%	Mean	Projection
Aerator	27	1.4	450
Chemical Applicator	69	1.5	1200
Dump Trucks	36	1.7	730
Lift Trucks	58	3.3	2300
Flat Bed Trucks	66	2.4	1900
Pickup Trucks	81	2.9	2800
Trailer Trucks	44	2.7	1400
Flail Mowers	49	1.4	820
Rotary Mowers	58%	1.6	1100
Reel Mowers	42	4.6	2300
Gang Mowers	64	4.6	3500
Fertilizer Applicators	71	1.8	1500
Small Utility Vehicles	21	2.0	500
Sod Cutters	71	2.3	2000
Self Contained Sod Harvesters	47	1.8	1000
Tractor Drawn Sod Harvesters	17	1.7	350
1-25 h.p. Tractors	33	1.7	670
26-50 h.p. Tractors	79	3.5	3300
51-100 h.p. Tractors	57	2.4	1600
100+ h.p. Tractors	22	1.9	500

Projected totals of acreage of sod farms.

	Projected to 1,200 farms
Total Acreage	349,000
Acres Planted in 1978	128,000
Acres Harvested in 1978	150,000
Acres Sold in 1977	135,000

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Survey

izer (\$50), followed by seed (\$33) and then herbicides (\$12). An average of \$7.50 per acre is spent for fungicides.

The 1,200 sod producers own 3,350 harvesters and cutters, 6,070 tractors, 7,720 mowers, 2,300 lift vehicles, 2,800 pickup trucks, 1,900 flat-bed trucks, 1,500 fertilizer spreaders, 1,200 spray rigs, 1,400 trailer trucks, and 450 aerators. A conservative value of equipment inventory of the average sod producer is \$250,000. **WTT**

Types of seed used for sod and number of respondents indicating use.

BERMUDA 19%

Tifway 419 or 328	22
Santa Ana	3
PD 102	2
Tiff Green	4
Midiron	2
Coastal	1
Common	2

BENT 3%

S71	1
Penncross	3
Seaside	1
Toronto C-15	1

BLUEGRASSES 67%

Baron	47
Merion	27
Glade	25
Fylking	26
Adelphi	23
Victa	15
Park	10
Windsor	6
Newport	8
Touchdown	7
Majestic	12
Pennstar	5
Others	33
Blends	34

FESCUE 15%

Pennlawn	5
Jamestown	2
K 31	4
Creeping Red	3

RYEGRASS 6%

Manhattan	4
Citation	1
Pennfine	2

ST. AUGUSTINE 10%

Floratom	8
Bitter Blue	4
Living Carpet	1
Blue-Green	1
Common Texas	1

ZOYSIA 12%

Emerald	11
Meyer Z-52	15
Metrella	2

ARGENTINE BAHIA 2%

CENTIPEDE 12%