

PROFILE

Pine Island Turf Nursery

The sod industry grew rapidly in the 60's. An example of a firm who entered the business in the mid-60's is Charles Lain, owner of Pine Island Turf Nursery in New York.

Lain left his job with Weyerhaeuser in 1964 and started a sod nursery in 1964. In 1966, he stepped out on his own. He served as president of the American Sod Producers Association in 1979 and today manages a 435 acre business with sales of more than \$500,000.

Lain's nursery is located in New York's largest sod growing region. The area has more than 3,000 acres of sod production on its black, mucky soil. Lain competes with Warren's Turf Nursery in the same area and other growers serving the New York City area including DeLalio and McGovern sod farms in Long Island.

The Pine Island area is among the richest in terms of soil fertility in the country, with vast onion, lettuce and celery production. The soil is acidic and contains a fair amount of aluminum and iron. "Chemicals that work on upland soil don't always work on muck soils," says Lain. In the fall, he applies 600 lbs./acre of 10-30-20 and three tons of lime per acre. He feeds again in late October with 300 lbs. of 20-5-5 and finally the next spring with 350 lbs./acre of 45 percent urea. Based on soil tests, he adds copper and adjusts the phosphate. He supplements the area's 25 inches of rainfall with irrigation.

Lain used Ryan sod cutters until 1974 when he bought his first Brouwer harvester. "The harvester has allowed us to get more production per acre by reducing loss between five and ten percent," says Lain. "It also allows us to harvest more tender, younger sod."

"It used to take 12 workers six hours to harvest one acre of sod using the sod cutter. Today, we harvest an acre in less than four hours with three to four workers," Lain boasts. The harvester enabled Lain to reduce peak season labor by eight persons.

Lain grows a blend of Adelphi, and two of three other improved Kentucky bluegrasses, Touchdown, Majestic and Glade. For shady areas, Lain sells a mixture of Warren's A-34, Glade, and Fortress and Jamestown fescues.

"Sod is plagued much more by weeds than disease," says Lain. After harvesting he applies Roundup to eliminate weeds such as Quackgrass. Crabgrass, foxtail, barnyardgrass, and other weeds are controlled by spring and fall applications of Banvel-D and 2-4,D and two applications of D.S.M.A.

In 1977, Lain lost nearly a third of his mature sod to leaf spot after a very wet spring. Lain indicated fungicide treatments are not required as often in his area as in others.

Marketing is a firm commitment to Lain. He spends nearly ten percent of his sales on billboards, newspaper advertising, brochures and radio messages. Sales have increased by nearly 20 percent per year since 1976. Eighty percent of his sales are to landscape contractors, 15 percent to garden centers, and five percent retail. He often provides retail customers with maintenance information to help assure the sod of proper care and Lain of a satisfied customer. *Story and interview by Carol Rose.*

seeded with common Kentucky bluegrass made the public take notice of improved turfgrasses. The demand upon garden centers and landscape contractors for improved turfgrasses grew. Landscape architects starting specifying the improved Kentucky bluegrasses.

Today, the number of new turfgrass cultivars is clouding the issue of what type of sod to produce. Sod producers must anticipate demand 18 months ahead of time. They know they have good demand for certain solid performers. Their willingness to devote much acreage to a steady stream of improved grasses is limited to the sales advantage of switching from one to another. So, their acceptance is slow



Gerry Brouwer

Ontario sod producer and equipment maker who helped spur the industry on with his side tracking sod harvester.

and cautious. Each time they add a new turfgrass they also accept the need to educate customers of the advantage of it. The fact that landscape contractors and architects are better voiced on improved turfgrasses does speed up the educational process. Therefore, seed growers have a larger educational job to do.

The number of sod producers has stabilized in the last five years. Acreages increase to meet rising demand. The market appears just as solid as Ben Warren found it in the late 30's, and some conglomerates are acquiring sod nurseries. Two examples are Cal Turf's acquisition by American Garden Products and its takeover by Amfac of Honolulu, a large agribusiness corporation, and the purchase of Southern Turf Nur-