

RESEARCH AND THE FUTURE

The inventiveness of the sod producer and support entities, i.e. university extension personnel and suppliers, has not diminished. Although the market has matured, demand continues to increase. Lack of appropriate hand labor strongly encourages further mechanization. The cost of water is rising rapidly in some regions encouraging the use of effluent water, efficient irrigation,

drainage recovery, water conditioners, more water efficient turfgrasses, and perhaps antitranspirants. Closely associated to water use is disease resistance. The American Sod Producers and the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America support turfgrass pathologists and breeders work toward more disease resistant cultivars. Rising petroleum prices

encourage the development of turfgrasses with lower maintenance requirements. This includes lower nitrogen needs, improved disease resistance, and improved insect resistance.

To accomplish all this, support must come from the sod producer made possible by less destructive competitive pricing, cooperation



Examples of inventiveness. Power splitter for springs invented by Bill Lyons of Canal Fulton, Ohio (left). Two-man spiker circa 1939 (top right). Sprig planter from John Deere circa 1950 (bottom right). Photos by F. V. Grau.

METRIC SOD

The U.S. conversion to metric, although slow, is occurring. At the same time, sod production technology developed in the U.S. and Canada is going worldwide.

Gerry Brouwer of Brouwer Turf Equipment Ltd. estimates that the demand for improved sod technology will grow in areas still strongly based in pasture sod. Areas such as South Africa, Australia, Holland, Germany and the United Kingdom are buying harvesters.

Canadian sod producers currently sell sod in .8 square meter rolls, which is the same as a square yard. The Nursery Sod Growers Association of Ontario pushed for the conversion to metric in 1978. So golf course superintendents, landscape contractors, and homeowners now must think in terms of meters instead of yards.

Although it would make sense to go to the square meter over the .8 square meter roll, sod producers say the full meter roll is too heavy to handle. Since nearly two-thirds of Ontario's bentgrass sod is sold to U.S. users, the acceptance of metric conversion will spread to northern states quickly.

No talk of converting machinery to the metric units has been proposed. But conversion is eminent and a little lesson in metric is appropriate.

CONVERSIONS:

area in square yards x 1.0451 = the number of 0.8 square meter rolls

area in square feet x 0.11612 = the number of 0.8 square meter rolls

area in square meters x 1.25 = the number of 0.8 square meter rolls

with other turf organizations, and a willingness to try new methods. Marketing techniques can be improved to increase demand, increase price, and solidify the image of sod as the surest way to have a quality lawn. Support to university research is critical, either by individual contributions by estates of those who lived comfortably from the sod industry or by organizational grants. Purchasing new machinery that has been improved, chemicals that make savings possible, and seed that exhibits improved characteristics will provide the commercial sector with the will to experiment and develop new products.

Future sod production will be an agronomically complex skill. It has come a long way from the pasture to the highly mechanized, irrigated, blend and mixture, and chemically complex profession. It has also become a sophisticated business with marketing and planning critical to growth. It will take study in addition to inventiveness to succeed in sod production in the future.

The continuously growing strength of the American Sod Producers Association will play a major role in accomplishing needed research and maintaining commercial interest in the market by suppliers. By making industry statistics available to potential suppliers and showing that its membership is receptive to new ideas ASPA can generate a tremendous commercial interest in sod production. This will encourage private research as well as public research on sod methodology.

ASPA is increasing its service to warm season sod producers in an effort to represent all U.S. growers. Recalling that two of the original five producers behind ASPA were growers of warm season grasses, southern growers should not categorize ASPA as for northern growers only.

Perhaps the most present challenge is marketing of sod. Full participation in the Landscape Industry Association Council (LIAC) could facilitate support from landscape architects and contractors, and to benefit from basic marketing problems of the Green Industry. Sophisticated promotional campaigns and record keeping could extract further market potential for sod. That potential, if realized and funnelled back into research and the supplier will assure continuous growth.

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