

New Mexico study reveals turfgrass large part of economy

The production and management of turfgrass in New Mexico "has added a new spoke to New Mexico's economic wheel," according to a survey commissioned by the Southwest Turfgrass Association and the New Mexico Department of Agriculture.

The survey measured three things: total areas of turf in the State, area of turfgrass by species, and manpower requirements for commercial operations. Turfgrass was defined as that "land area covered by a maintained species of grass used for sports, recreation, general landscape, and commercial sod production."

Total areas of turfgrass, including highway right-ofway, golf courses, airports, schools, sod farms, parks, cemeteries, and other commercial facilities, totaled 359,000 acres. Commercial sod producers accounted for 750 acres. Common bermudagrass is the most common species of turfgrass grown, totaling 16,770 acres. Average man-hours for maintenance during May 1 through Nov. 1 totaled 44,270; between Nov. 1 and May 1, the total was 12,270 hours. Dr. William Stephens, director of the New Mexico Dept. of Agriculture, said the survey "opened a lot of eyes to this industry in the state." He expects that it will attract dollars in increased sales of equipment, pesticides, and fertilizers.

For a copy of the survey, write Dr. Stephens at: New Mexico Dept. of Agriculture, New Mexico State University, P.O. Box 3189, Las Cruces, NM 88003.

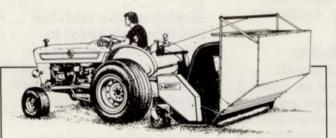
Sod growers remain active when turf becomes dormant

December brings cold weather and frigid ground to all but the southern tips of the U.S., but work does not totally slack off for the sod grower.

Ralph White, vice president and director of Southern Turf Nurseries in Tifton, GA, is still selling turf to Florida golf courses in late November, but it is a rare load that ships out in December, January, or February. His crew rebuilds, repairs, and paints equipment; it also takes this time for vacations.

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"The sales force is always busy," White says. "We have a lot of office meetings and critique our work of the past year."

With no revenue coming in, it is a little risky keeping people working throughout winter. But White says in the relatively mild Georgia climate, the crew can usually work on the land.

James Huggett, owner of Long Island Farm, Inc., Marshall, WI, does not have to worry about mild winter days to work on the land. After he finishes fall fertilizing and fitting—leveling, grading, and installing surface drains—it is time for shop work.

Huggett's crew cleans, repairs, and paints mowers, plows, harrows, rototillers, and sweepers as well as sharpens mower blades. Important to check are things like bearings and other small items which have given the crew problems during the growing season.

Since most of Huggett's crew are migrant workers, they will return to Texas in late November. Regional conferences begin in December and Huggett will attend as many as possible to supplement his knowledge.

Scientists find that substances in fescue inhibit other plants

Future varieties of tall fescue may grow more compatibly with birdsfoot trefoil or red clover than present varieties of fescue do. That's because researchers now are focusing on a phenomenon called allelopathy.

Allelopathic substances, or plant compounds known as allelochemics, can inhibit growth of other plants and animals. Agronomists Elroy J. Peters and Arthur G. Matches of the USDA's Science and Education Administration and their University of Missouri, Columbia, colleagues have found that breeding lines of tall fescue differ in their allelopathic powers.

The research team has used water to leach allelochemics from leaves of fescue lines, providing crude extracts for a variety of experiments. "Extracts from fescue foliage sampled from June through September are less potent than extracts from January through May samples," Peters says. "We've also found that nitrogen fertilization increases the allelopathic effects of tall fescue."

In one experiment, the scientists treated red clover seeds and birdsfoot trefoil with extracts from six tall fescue breeding lines. Within two weeks, only 41 to 56 percent of the treated clover seeds germinated, depending on which extract was applied, while 82 percent of nontreated seeds germinated. Germination of treated birdsfoot trefoil seeds ranged from 29 to 53 percent while the nontreated seeds' germination percentage was 66.

Peters says that the allelopathic effects of fescue may also be used to develop future varieties of fescue which may inhibit the growth of crabgrass. Some scientists have suggested that weed-inhibiting allelochemics might also confer to plants some resistance to disease and insects.



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