Sod Production and Topsoil Loss

The present day concern over topsoil loss to erosion has expanded in some areas to a concern over soil depletion by sod production. If fact, some sod producers claimed soil depletion allowances in 1978 before the American Sod Producers Association convinced Congress that such allowances did not fit the practice of harvesting sod. Had ASPA not obtained this exemption for sod producers, they would have been forced to implement an inventory system of accounting for tax purposes.

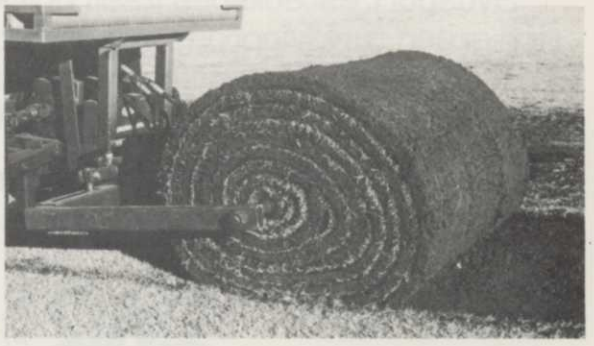
Great strides have been made in reducing sod thickness over the last 20 years. Researchers and sod growers have proven the benefits of thinner sod. Thinner sod roots more rapidly and cuts transportation and handling costs. Sod thickness is today primarily a function of sod strength. Knives are set just low enough to prevent scalping on uneven spots in the fields.

Research by Skogley and Hesseltine at the University of Rhode Island has identified harvesting method and the age of a stand as the main factors in sod thickness. Three-year-old sod could be cut at slightly thinner thicknesses than two-year-old sod. The machinery's ability to handle uneven fields can reduce the thickness further.

Actual blade adjustment may seem minute, but a 1/16-in. higher setting could save six tons of soil loss per acre.

Production of sod, as compared to other agronomic crops, actually improves the organic matter content of the soil by two percent per harvest. This is due to the fact that most of the turfgrass roots remain in the soil after harvesting and decompose.

Skogley and Hesseltine found that sod production removed less topsoil than many other crops. Wind and water erosion are greatly reduced by grass cover as opposed to open crops such as corn, soybeans, and cotton. Planting winter wheat often provides farmers with reduced winter topsoil loss.



Topsoil removed *during sod harvesting is less than many conventional agricultural crops.*