

# COOPERATION URGED TO SOLVE SUSPICIOUS SODDED LAWN PROBLEMS

As sod producers and lawn care businessmen are well aware, some antagonism has developed in the last four years due to Fusarium Blight infection in sodded lawns maintained by lawn care companies. No one has yet developed an accurate, objective opinion on this matter. There are at least a dozen theories as to why sodded lawns tend to become infected with Fusarium more readily than lawns established from seed and why lawn care is suspected by some to be part of the problem.

Having worked for both a major sod farm and a lawn care company, Professional Turf Corp./Hydro Lawn, I have experience in both sides of the issue. Several hundred of the more than 1,000 lawns installed under my direction in the early seventies became infected during the first year of establishment with diseases, a large percentage of which was Fusarium. Very few of these lawns receive professional lawn care although a large percentage receive adequate homeowner care.

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This experience leads me to believe that the current circumstance is probably a natural phenomenon that possibly both the sod growers and lawn care industry enhance by way of unknown action.

The position I take, which represents the lawn care industry in general, is guilt can not be clearly laid to either the sod producer or the lawn care



**By Jerome Faulring**, president of the Professional Lawn Care Association of America. Based upon speech to be presented during the summer meeting of the American Sod Producers Association

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businessman, although both appear to have the problem in the marketplace. Furthermore, the concern is real and a scientific solution requires cooperation between sod producers and lawn care businessmen. If either party independently seeks the answers without participation from the other, the non-active group is going to remain skeptical even in the face of facts.

It is interesting to note that although Fusarium was first identified almost 14 years ago and has probably had more research interest than any other turf disease, it still remains the least understood of all the widespread diseases. This is true because it is very difficult to simulate field-like infections of Fusarium in the laboratory. Soil borne diseases, unlike foliar diseases, are difficult to study because of the very complex nature of the soil and multiple pathogen complexes found in the soil system.

There is a strong need for both industries to solve this problem. Professional lawn care is now a multi-billion dollar industry and continues to grow at an annual rate of 20 percent. Like the sod production industry, lawn care is here to stay.

It is a fact in my market area that lawn care businessmen refer dozens of homeowners to sod installers for lawn replacement. Likewise,

## Lawn Care Industry view:

1. Fusarium susceptible monostands and polystands
2. Muck grown sod does not readily transfer to mineral soil and vice versa
3. Sod is often fertilized prior to harvest to enhance visual quality
4. Sod bed is over fertilized prior to laying sod to stimulate rapid visual improvement of new lawn
5. Harvest, transport and installation can create stress and susceptibility
6. Disease pathogen brought from point of harvest
7. Sod installed at time periods when grass wants to enter dormancy naturally but is stimulated by sod bed fertilizer and establishment irrigation

## Sod grower view:

1. Lawns cared for by lawn care companies are over fertilized
2. Improper sod bed preparation
3. Too much post emergent herbicide
4. Repeated annual use of same pre-emergent herbicide
5. Sodded lawns are mature at time of installation compared with seeded lawns which enhances susceptibility to any disease
6. Mis-diagnosis — not Fusarium at all in some instances
7. Liquid application technique enhances potential for over application
8. Improper variety selection in some instances
9. Disease pathogen existent at planting site

installers and growers refer many homeowners to lawn care services after installations are completed. This inherent dependency on each other can be very harmonious and profitable for both groups.

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Several million homeowners receiving lawn care require re-establishment services. This number may increase due to drought damage being experienced in many parts of the country. Currently, a very high percentage of that work is done by overseeding, although many lawn care businessmen dislike this method. It is conceivable that sod producers could help relieve the lawn care industry of one of its headaches.

Interviews with more than a dozen sod growers, lawn care businessmen, and research specialists have revealed that the antagonism is created at the service level of staffing in the lawn

care industry, often sales people misinformed or trying to skirt blame for a problem. The problem may be too complex for many to put into perspective. Answers to give these people are needed. The solution will be found more quickly if the lawn care industry and the sod industry work together. **WTT**

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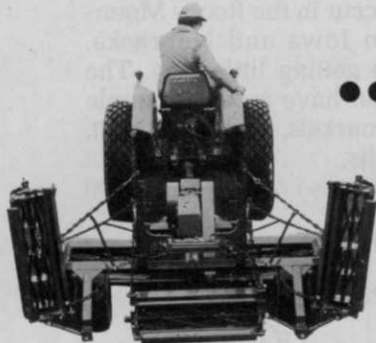
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