

## A NEW BREED

Oregon Turf Farms  
sees renovation market growing;  
users finding sod  
cheaper in the long run

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Sod is stacked on pallets as harvester keeps cutting.

"The concept of renewing a turf area is relatively new. Traditionally, people thought lawns would last a lifetime. That just isn't the case."

Will Lighty, manager of Oregon Turf Farms in Hubbard, OR, is building part of his company's future on that opinion.

"The people in the 25 to 30 age

range are a whole different breed," Lighty continued. "They're looking at new options and a new approach to everything, including sodding instead of seeding. Some people who are buying homes and who may have seeded once, are turning to sod for their second home or when they decide to renovate their lawn."

The concept of renovation is also helping Oregon Turf Farm sales.

"New home construction isn't the only source of buyers for us," said Lighty. "Renovation of old homes and property is a market we will continue to concentrate on. People are realizing the advantages of the adaptability and immediacy of sod."

Lighty has managed the 350-acre production area since the company's founding in 1976. Lighty holds a Master's Degree from Colorado State University in Ornamental Horticulture and Turf Management. Oregon Turf Farms is owned by Tom D'Armond.

On the average, Lighty spends \$6,000 to \$8,000 a year on seed and works with a staff of five.

"We use a ryegrass, bluegrass and fine fescue combination, but we're always looking for improved types," he said. "We're a very quality-conscious company."

Among his bluegrasses, he uses Shasta and Sydsport; Citation, Manhattan and Pennfine ryegrass; and Jamestown fine fescue. He is also "looking at hard fescues." Because of the lack of demand, he grows no bentgrass sod.

"Landscape contractors and retail garden centers are our main customers, however, we do get



Modern sod equipment (Princeton harvester shown) increases speed and reduces handling.



Will Lighty, right, in the field with Chuck DeJardin.

homeowners buying directly from us," he said. "We have felt some side-effects of the recession, but there is still a demand for sod."

In fact, Lighty has seen the demand for sod steadily increase over the past five years. Contractors are rethinking the cost of sod in light of the scope of an entire project.

"Immediacy is important in the case of resorts, hotels, and restaurants," explained Lighty. "Seeding requires six to eight months of maturing to achieve the same net result that sod gives as soon as its laid. Appearances are very important on jobs like these because appearances attract people to businesses."

Lighty also pointed to the fact that some maintenance contracts require as much as up to a year for seeded jobs, while for sod, it's usually a 60-day contract.

"This is especially important if a job is located far away from the home-base of the company," he said. "In this case, sod may be initially more, but it pays in the long run."

While the company hasn't reduced the amount of care it gives to its turf, it has reduced irrigation costs by getting the fields in good

condition and irrigating less.

Lighty uses a commercial nitrogen fertilizer, sometimes straight, other times blended with phosphate, potash and sulphur.

"We still use netting, but the material is more mature at harvest time," he said.

The company's greatest marketing tool is word of mouth. It tries to live up to its slogan, "We're easy to get a lawn with."

"The quality and reputation of our product is the key to our sales," Lighty said. "Success of our product is always a concern. We try to help our customers utilize the product in a way that will be successful."

The adaptability of Oregon Turf Farm's sod was proven in a shopping mall where sod was laid on asphalt and is doing beautifully.

"The future of the industry looks excellent," Lighty says. "Sod is a useful tool in the builder/developer's bag of useful tools. All people who are serious in using property as a money-maker, must seriously consider sod."

"It's really a matter of being an educational process," Lighty continued, "showing people options they may not have been aware of."

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