

by Bruce F. Shank, executive editor

Sod prices finally rise

In the past ten years the cost of construction materials has doubled, that is the cost of everything except sod.

To counteract flat prices, sod growers invested in more efficient machinery to squeeze every penny out of every foot of sod. When prices still did not rise and recession devastated construction, they started phasing their acreage into more reliable crops.

That was last year. This year many sod growers are sold out, including their fall harvests. For once demand is allowing prices to rise 15 to 25 percent, sod growers told me during the American Sod Producers summer convention.

Good sod growers have junked older varieties and monostands for mixtures of two to five improved Kentucky bluegrasses, often two improved fine fescues, and one or two improved perennial ryegrasses. Many are now producing sod of improved tall fescues, in some cases mixed with ten percent Kentucky bluegrass.

Sod today is a better product, produced by better growers, and no longer just a price sensitive commodity.

Athletic fields for profit

Entrepreneurs have begun to dabble in athletic fields for hire. They build sports complexes, provide officials, maintain the fields, and make them available to public leagues and teams for a price.

Examples are Kings Island, north of Cincinnati, OH., which built the latest PAT football field for use by area high schools; the Olympia Spa and Resort in Oconomoc, WI, which now boasts a private polo facility; and Softball World of Cleveland, OH, which has two facilities with five lighted softball fields surrounding a lounge, children's play area, and restaurant.

The American Softball Association told *Weeds Trees & Turf's* Ron Hall there are more than 40 private multi-field softball complexes in the U.S.

Demand for athletic fields has reached a point where profit is possible. If the concept takes hold, private facilities may relieve the pressure on some public fields, or they may create higher standards for public field managers to meet.

Outdoor equipment gets own show

Outdoor equipment manufacturers and distributors are proudly claiming their own show after the first Lawn Garden and Power Equipment Expo, held in July in Louisville, KY.

No longer do they have to walk aisles and aisles of plumbing and toasters at the Hardware Show in McCormick Place in Chicago to find mowers, irrigation supplies, and accessories. Supporters of the Hardware Show were surprised to see the combined indoor and outdoor exhibits organized by the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute, The Engine Service Association, and the Outdoor Power Equipment Distributors Association.

Call it curiosity, call it luck, but it worked.

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