

Public opinion, worker attitudes and increasing governmental regulation are forging a new path for government managers. The challenge isn't going unanswered.

The Government Dilemma: Agronomics vs. Budgets

by Maureen Hrehocik, managing editor

A whole laundry list of concerns is on the minds of government landscape managers across the country.

Frozen budgets, battling the overall economy, pesticide regulation and responsible use of chemicals, a rapidly changing industry, public and employee attitudes, professionalism and education of government landscape managers and their employees, and lack of water top the list according to a WEEDS TREES & TURF survey.

Doing more with less was the overall concern of most managers who responded.

One city landscape manager seemed to sum up the sentiments of many. "We have to consistently produce the quality product, (athletic fields, landscaping, mowing, park maintenance) which the general public and taxpayer have come to expect with increasingly dwindling budgets and crews."

And most know there are no easy answers.

Says another, "We have to be able to sell ourselves to those people in the government who control the budget and make decisions where the money goes. I think landscape management will have an even more difficult time being recognized by the government with all areas that are being cut back (from) federal support."

A profile

Most respondents to the survey were in managerial positions with an aver-

age of 11 years in the industry. Most were involved in city landscape management with state employees following a close second.

They supervise an average land-

government managers in particular. However, our respondents, on the average, managed 889 acres (a high of 10,000 acres, a low of 3). An average of 34 acres of that is devoted to athletic

fields. (A few respondents noted volunteer help played somewhat of a role in the maintenance of athletic fields, but the majority were done by city and state crews as part of the regular maintenance schedule).

Intensive care

Respondents were asked to rank by importance certain maintenance areas. Athletic field maintenance, turf and tree management (tie) and indoor building maintenance ranked as "Very Important"; roadside maintenance and tree management (tie), military installations, and turf management ranked in the top three as "Important"; and airports, cemeteries and school maintenance ranked in the top three as "Not Important". (See Table 1)

Plant and landscape installation and tree trimming are the jobs that get contracted out the most.

Tree spraying, paving and asphaltting, capital improvements and large tree fertilization and removal were also jobs most government landscape managers contracted out.

The budget

Survey results show January, March and February are the months in which most budget planning is done.

About half of the respondents pre-

TABLE 1
Importance of Duties Performed

	Very Important	Important	Not Important
Roadside Maintenance	23%	43%	44%
Athletic Fields	64%	14%	22%
Buildings (Outdoor Maint.)	40%	30%	30%
Buildings (Indoor Maint.)	54%	23%	23%
Park Maintenance	48%	23%	29%
School Maintenance	34%	08%	65.29%
Turf Management	51%	39%	10%
Tree Management	51%	43%	6%
Street Maintenance	21%	34%	45%
Snow Removal	39%	.13%	60.87%
Golf Course(s)	.8%	8%	84%
Military Installation	0	41%	59%
Airport	3%	9%	88%
Cemetery	19%	11%	70%

scape crew of 11 (a high of 50, low of 1). Over the past two years the landscape crew size has pretty much stayed the same, although 20 percent said their crew had decreased (one by as much as 2/3) and only a few reported increases.

With the static crew size comes an increase in total acreage to be maintained. Results here varied greatly because of the scope of some state

dict their budgets will stay the same in 1986, with 1/4 predicting an increase. Again, the 1985 budget amounts were scattered across the board; from a high of \$8 million to a low of \$1,500. About 1/4 of that budget goes for roadside vegetation management and about 14 percent is earmarked for tree maintenance.

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sources, but in a majority of cases from part of the city budget. In other cases, user fees, state agencies, special taxes, cemetery lot sales and interments, and gasoline taxes provide the funding.

Chemicals, equipment

A concern for proper chemical and pesticide use was apparent from many of the respondents. Says one, "We have to stop using as many and as much herbicides and insecticides and start finding safer and public supported alternatives."

But another laments, "I was asked not to buy or apply fertilizer for the '85-'86 fiscal year. We bought none in '84-'85 and our supply is almost gone. Our best turf areas are starting to look like our worst."

Fertilizers top the list as the chemical used the most as a regular part of most landscape maintenance programs. (In another WEEDS TREES & TURF survey of a larger reader base conducted by a national readership research firm, projections for a total expenditures in 1985 for dry-applied turf fertilizer will be \$34,200,000; for liquid-applied, \$5,340,000.) Herbicides for turf weed control are second, herbicides for total vegetation control are third. (Projected 1985 expenditures for pre-emergence her-

What is your primary source of information for new seed varieties, chemicals and equipment?

- 1 Trade Magazines
- 2 Local Distributors
- 3 Fellow Superintendents and Managers
- 4 (A combination of the above 3)

What types of jobs do you contract out?

- Plant and landscape installation
- Tree trimming
- Tree spraying
- Paving

bicides are \$7,210,000; for post-emergents, \$9,840,000.) Turf insecticides, tree insecticides, wetting agents, fungicides and growth regulators round out the list. (Projections for 1985 expenditures in these areas are: turf insecticides, \$3,710,000; tree insecticides, \$5,580,000; wetting agents, \$616,000; fungicides, \$3,970,000; and growth regulators, \$1,500,000).

A majority of respondents recommend, specify and purchase seed, chemicals and equipment. In only a few cases were the recommendation and specification responsibility left to someone else.

In 86 percent of the cases, equipment is purchased under bid. A little more than half the respondents purchased their chemicals under bid. A handful made seed purchases under bid.

Chain saws are the most common piece of equipment owned by the respondents (91 percent), small push mowers and large riding mowers are the second most important pieces of machinery owned (87 percent) and dump trucks are owned by the depart-

ments of 78 percent of the respondents.

Other equipment includes: chemical spreaders (74 percent); tree or turf sprayers (70 percent); turf aerifiers or corers (60 percent); large walk-behind mowers (49 percent); wood chippers (38 percent); and trenchers (30 percent).

Challenges ahead

It's not only the nuts and bolts of budgets, equipment maintenance, chemical purchases, and work schedules that are vying for the where-with-all of government landscape managers. They also have to be molders of public opinion.

One southeastern landscape manager said, "One of our most important tasks is getting people to understand quality landscapes take time and money."

Another concurs. "We have to educate the public about the long-term costs of landscape maintenance; specifically that landscapes are dynamic living systems which need constant care at a consistent level, plus periodic upgrade if the landscape is to be kept in top condition."

Government landscape managers have also set goals and challenges among their own ranks, acknowledging their own responsibility to their profession. Says one, "We have to keep ourselves aware of improved products suitable to be used around

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the public and wildlife, ie. protect the delicate balance of nature in the water, marsh and birdlife."

And closer to home, many of the managers responding said improved employee relations and work attitudes were a high priority.

"We have to educate our younger people coming into the field better to give us a better image in the eyes of the public," responds one manager. "We as an industry have to take pride in our work and pride in our profession. It starts with us." **WT&T**