

With word from the University of Cincinnati that its "robot" lawn mower may soon have a manufacturer, other companies are being forced to constantly keep up with innovative developments in the mower industry. But trends outside of manufacturing—but within the green industry—also influence mower production.

"Customers, both golf course and lawn care, are becoming increasingly cost-conscious," notes Jeff Mack, Lesco's equipment products manager. "They will not, however, sacrifice quality to attain this goal. We also see a trend in the customer becoming more self-sufficient in the maintenance of his equipment, again with an eye toward controlling costs."

Many manufacturers cited cost-consciousness as influencing purchases.

"End users have begun to understand that there are false savings buying cheap products," says Lee Bouldin, marketing services manager for Gravely International. "It is much more economical in the long run to buy quality first."

"Industrywide, the very intense price competition will continue," notes Charles Berry, national sales manager for Ariens.

Berry names the development of front cutting mowers, high horsepower and wider cuts as influential changes in mower manufacturing. "We are emphasizing better bagging, quieter products, longer warranties and high power," he says.

"Time and cost efficiency are more in demand with a greater emphasis on quality of cut," says Timothy Phelan, manager of merchandising for Wheel Horse Products. "They want the same individual to be able to mow more grass in less time without sacrificing any quality in the cut."

Howard Day, vice president of sales for Yazoo, says rotaries will become even more popular as manufacturers develop easier handling equipment.

Jack Steinhour, advertising manager for Woods Division of Hesston, agrees that rotaries are becoming a viable alternative because maintenance costs are lower.

"There are greater demands by all users of mowing equipment for less frequent maintenance intervals, automatic clipping collection, best quality of cut possible, overall noise reduction and more attention to operator safety," says Clarke Staples, turf manager for Cushman.

Manufacturing's future

John Kinhead, sales manager for Na-



Mower manufacturing has been influenced by both social changes and industry trends.

MOWER TRENDS

Technology has influenced mower manufacturing. But perhaps bigger influences are the trends in golf course and landscape management.

by Heide Aungst, associate editor

tional Mower, says the formula is simple: "more production and more efficiency in production."

As for trends in manufacturing, Phelan says, "I believe there is a trend to more hydrostatic drives in the lawn and garden tractor area, while zero turning radius continues to grow in the commercial mowing machine marketplace."

"There is an increasing use of and demand for grass-catching equipment," adds Rick Bressie, director of communications for the Grasshopper Co.

Robert Martin, president of Exmark Manufacturing, says manufacturers will develop even more specialized equipment in the future.

Mower safety is a big issue in manufacturing says Pat Scholl, communications manager for the Alamo Group.

"Most of the trends in golf course/landscape management that have affected mower manufacturers have to do with the relationship between the machine and its operator, like operator convenience, operator safety, and

reducing operator time," says Chris Covert, director of administration and international operations for Simplicity Manufacturing.

"The growth of landscape contracting and maintenance business has led to the development of more versatile equipment capable of performing more than one function," says Jim Taylor of Heckendorn.

"The trend toward lower mowing heights on golf course fairways and greens is leading to more sophisticated mowers, more intensive turf maintenance," says James Byrnes, advertising manager for Jacobsen. Byrnes adds that improvements such as hydraulics for traction, implement drives and durable, economical diesel engines are becoming increasingly popular.

Dick Lehman, executive vice president for Ransomes, cites the desire of golf course superintendents and landscape managers to have lightweight mowing equipment as an influencing factor in manufacturing.

"There's been a growth in the fine turf industry," says Rich Jenks, adver-

tising supervisor for Deere and Co. "There's better maintained turf at golf courses, parks, playgrounds and athletic facilities. With that, I see an opportunity for John Deere to move in."

Quality care

"We've seen our walk-behind mowers become popular with golf courses concerned with quality. They've gone back to walking greensmowers. It gives a superior cut, but they make a time sacrifice. Just this year we've seen interest in walk-behind mowing of tees also," says Mike Burch, advertising agent for Bunton.

G.C. Mitchell, marketing manager for Brouwer Turf Equipment, lists five popular mower features: low compaction, low fuel consumption, ease of operation, ease of service and repairing, and a reasonable price.

"As turf conditions vary from one marketplace to another, we strive to listen to our customers' needs worldwide, resulting in special design, engineering, and simplicity," Mitchell says.

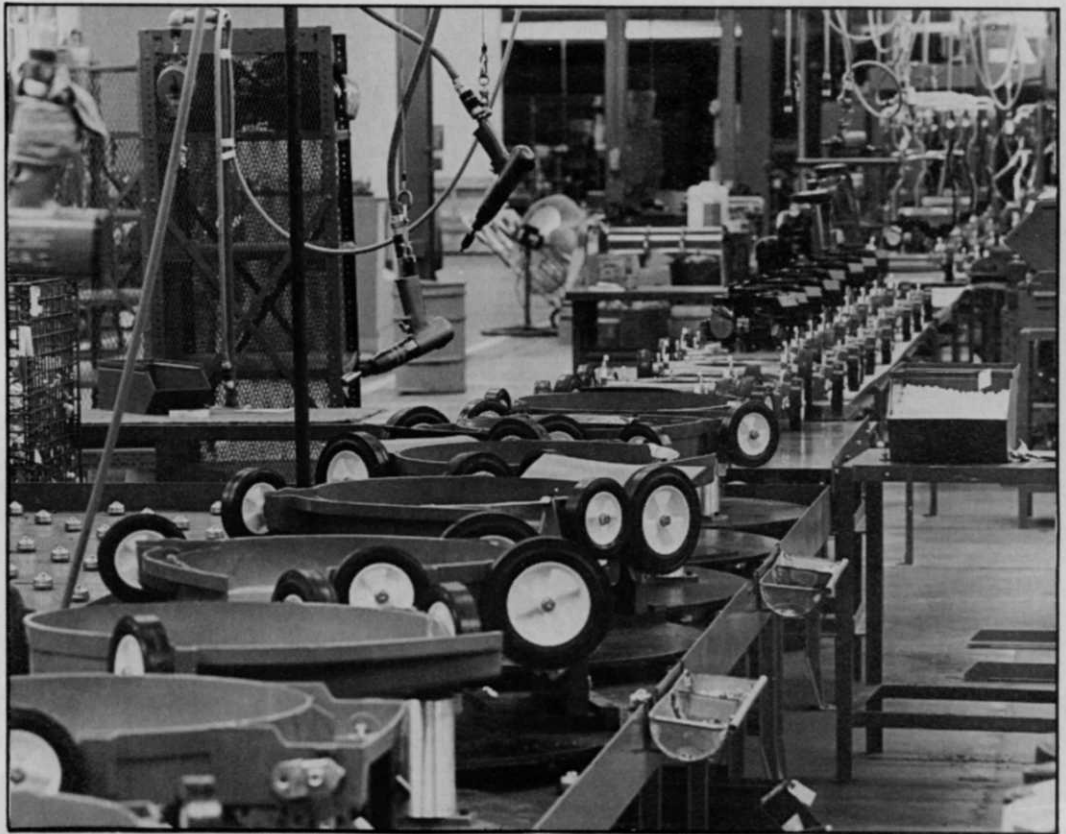
Jim Wright, marketing manager for the Grazer Division, Willsey-D, says mower changes have been caused by an increased dependency on commercial operators. "More residential areas are also becoming more dependent on commercial operators," he explains.

Mike Schaefer, vice president of F.D. Kees Manufacturing Co., feels the operator is looking for "quality performance in equipment which requires less down time."

Robert Martin, president of Exmark Manufacturing, says the landscape manager wants simply "more specialized equipment."

"Landscape management is growing rapidly and is going to be a very strong market in the future," says Kevin McGrath, president of Locke Manufacturing. "The golf course market is fairly stable."

"The commercial landscape market is increasing at a very, very fast pace compared to the rest of the power



Industry experts predict that robotics will influence manufacturing more than actual mowing.

equipment industry," agrees Betty Schwarz, customer service manager for Scag Power Equipment.

"The number of lawn care companies which have begun to mow grass has influenced manufacturing," says Don Weakley, Snapper's senior vice president for corporate development.

This growth in the lawn care and landscape markets translates into better sales for some companies. "We're expecting a five percent unit sales increase at least in 1987," says Mike Tomita, marketing coordinator for Kubota Tractor Corp.

Society's influence

Changing patterns in society also have affected mower manufacturing. "The commercial business continues expanding as the population ages, people move from suburbs into apartments and condominiums, and ever-increasing park and green belt areas are being mowed," explains Dean Ziegenbein, product manager for Gilson Bros. "Users of mowing equipment are looking for faster cutting ability, less down time for maintenance, and lower cost for new replacement mowers."

"The fact that there are people out there trying to make a living by cutting grass puts pressure on manufacturers to produce equipment which is

durable and reliable," says Dave Welfelt, sales manager for Excel.

"The high initial cost of developed land, and the cost of maintaining green areas around new projects is creating a trend away from large turf areas and favors the use of a larger number of small landscaped areas," says Bob Walker, president of Walker Manufacturing.

Safety is another concern of mower manufacturers. Edwin Toolis, president of Vrismo Manufacturing, says the safety features and versatility of flail mowers make them better than rotaries.

"An increasing number of people seek more recreation facilities, the factor of operating safely becomes mandatory," says Howard Wilbrandt, director of marketing for the Mathews Company. "We believe flail mowing will be a requirement wherever people and mowing share the same turf simultaneously."

Bomford & Evershed marketing director E.A. McLaren says the key is to manufacture a flail mower which will reduce the frequency of cut.

One final trend worth noting: the use of rotary mowers for golf course greens. "Before, there were never rotaries on the course," notes manufacturer Howard Price. "But we're selling a number of rotaries with 72- to 180-inch cuts for use on roughs."