

Wisconsin LCO is satisfied with results of new weed program

Spring-Green Lawn Care's 'biological' program stresses fertility, cuts herbicide use, receives customer approval.

■ When, just over a year ago, Steve Good redirected his company into a "biological" program, he was admittedly apprehensive.

After all, his Spring-Green Lawn Care franchise had been successful as a traditional application company as it grew toward \$1.4 million in annual sales in and around Racine, Wis., in the far southeast corner of the state. "People aren't always receptive to change, especially when what you did in the past worked," says Good.

But he felt he had to make fundamental changes in product choice and product application to deliver the new earth-friendly service he wanted to market. The catch: these changes had to work. Spring-Green had to continue to give homeowners 1) green lawns and 2) weed-free lawns. Or they'd leave.

One change in the program involved grassy weed control; and, Good realized, nothing irks a homeowner more—especially one paying for professional service—than a healthy crop of crabgrass in their lawn.

But Good knew the credibility of his company's new efforts would suffer if it continued to blanket-apply pre-emergence herbicides each spring to control grassy weeds.

So, along with switching to organic-based fertilizers, Good abandoned blanket pre-emergence applications in favor of targeted, as-needed applications of a relatively new material, dithiopyr, marketed under the trade name Dimension Turf Herbicide. (Its manufacturer, Monsanto, claims the herbicide has both pre-emergence and early post-emergence activity.)

As Spring-Green technicians walk a lawn, applying granular organic-based fertilizer (Spring Valley Turf Products), they also scout for breakthrough grassy weeds, which they then spot-treat using Solo backpack sprayers. They also treat turf borders. Good says his company backs up its service with the guarantee of a retreat.

"The success of the whole program

depends on your technicians," says Good. "If the technicians don't take the backpack sprayers out of their trucks and use them, you're going to have trouble."

Spring-Green didn't change its program without first directing a strong educational effort at its customers.

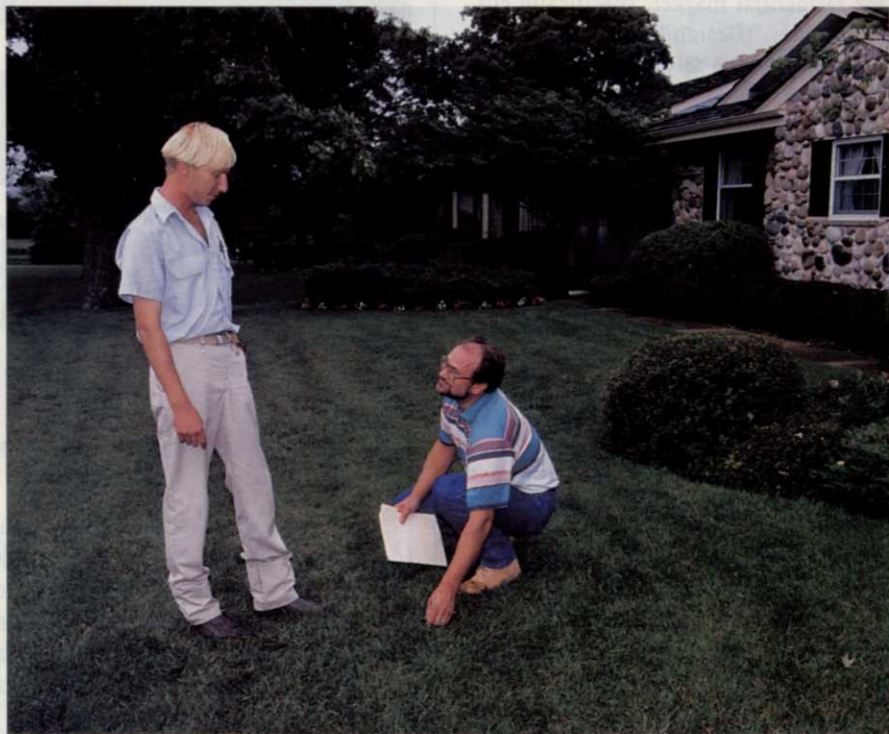
"We're retraining our customers," says Good. "We tell them that a strong, healthy

turf is going to resist crabgrass infestation. We also leave mowing and watering instructions with them. It's working great."

Of the approximate 1500 customers served by his company, only about six still request the traditional program, says Good.

"For a while, the phone rang all the time with people who were pleased. People told their neighbors that we were not broadcasting lawn chemicals, and just taking care of what is needed."

—Tobi Bolt



Steve Good, kneeling, and Dion La Meer of Spring-Green say the best defense against weeds is healthy turfgrass and technicians who know how to scout.

Write for PLCAA ad guidelines

■ Lawn care advertising continues to be scrutinized at the state and federal level.

To help lawn care professionals provide information about their products and services that isn't misleading or incomplete, the Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA) developed advertising guidelines that apply to all communications with the public and customers.

"The advertising practices of our industry continue to receive a lot of attention from state and federal regulators," says Tom Delaney of PLCAA. "Lawn care professionals need to keep in mind that advertising, by definition, includes all communications with customers and the public,

including letters and any statements made over the phone or in person."

The guidelines include information LCOs need to know about EPA and FTC advertising standards. They describe language that is considered misleading, conflicting or unsubstantiated. They also explain what to say about safety claims.

"All lawn care professionals should have this document on hand when they're developing their advertising materials and company literature," says Delaney.

For a free copy, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to: *PLCAA Advertising Guidelines*, 1000 Johnson Ferry Rd., Suite C-135, Marietta, GA 30068-2112.