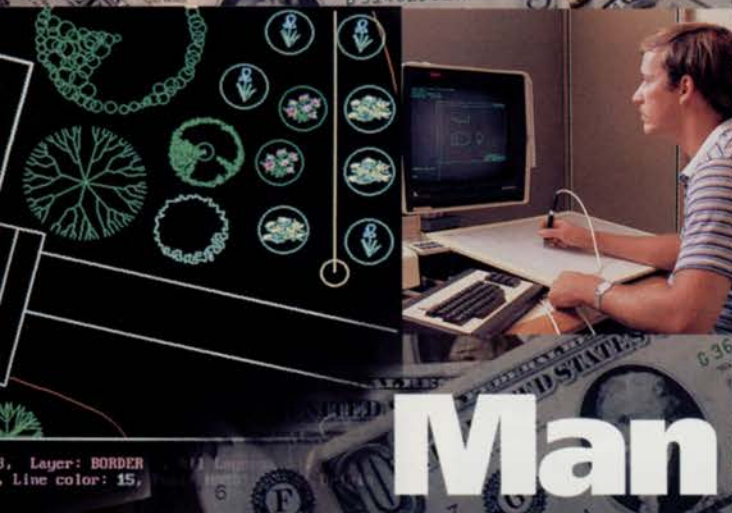


## STATE OF THE INDUSTRY



# Man and machine

**T**he availability of alternate labor and the new generation of fast, inexpensive computers are changing the face of the green industry, according to statistics compiled by Readex, Inc., for *LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT* magazine.

Computer use at organizations that subscribe to *LM* has grown to more than 70 percent. As few as 10 years ago, it was less than 20 percent.

Leading the way are landscape contractors, 76 percent of whom now use computers for administrative tasks, landscape and irrigation design, and communication. Though golf superintendents lag slightly—behind landscapers, lawn care owners and grounds managers—in computer access, their number is expected to grow as more computer-controlled irrigation systems are installed on golf courses.

Surprisingly, the survey found almost half (47 percent) of all computers in the green industry are hooked up to a fax/modem, making "conversation" with suppliers and other

*Readers of LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT controlled the purse strings on more than \$25 billion dollars in 1995. They used a good deal of the money to hire 'non-traditional' labor and purchase top-of-the-line computers.*

by JERRY ROCHE / Editor-in-Chief

golf/landscape professionals possible.

"The rapid and easy exchange of ideas has only begun to be felt," notes Tom Pinney Jr. of Evergreen Nurseries, Sturgeon Bay, Wis., a director of the American Association of Nurserymen. "We are in an age where society demands instant everything, from meals to landscapes. And, with the advent of the 'Information Superhighway,' demands are going to grow even more."

Twenty-one percent of all

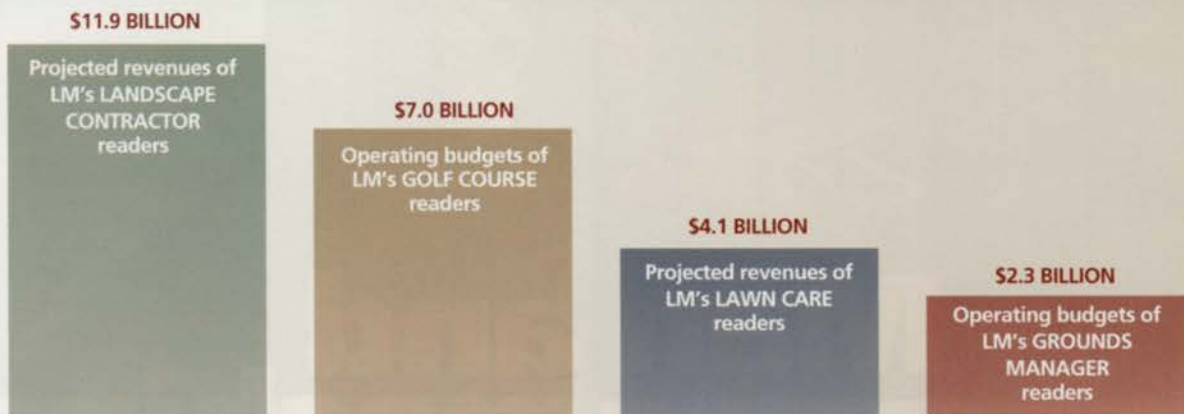
*LM* readers use their computers for electronic mail ("e-mail") messages, or to access agronomic, government and product information.

The green industry still trails other industries in its use of online services. Just 14 percent have access to the Internet, the fast-growing computer web that has millions of subscribers around the world.

As quickly as computers are changing the green industry, the real explosion is yet to come, according to Peter McCormick of TurfNet Associ-

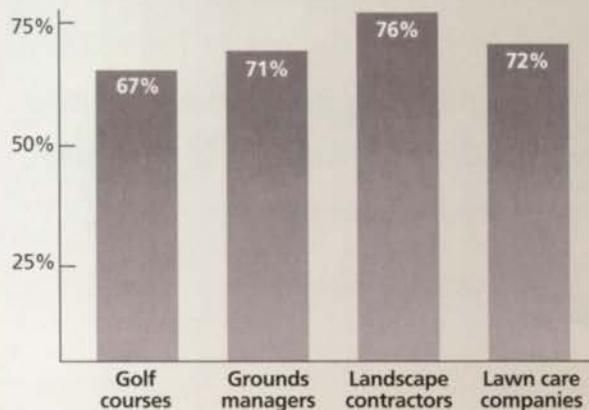
# STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

## 1995 BOTTOMLINE BUSINESS

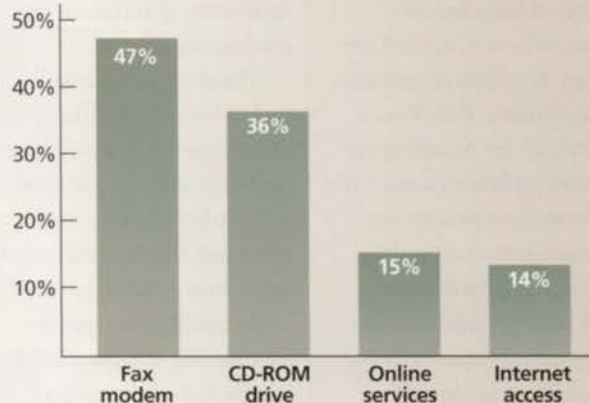


## COMPUTER ACCESS

### RESPONDENTS WITH COMPUTERS AT WORK



### ACCESSORIES AVAILABLE TO THOSE WITH COMPUTERS



ates, Skillman, N.J. More than 450 golf course superintendents in the U.S. and Canada access supplier information and "chat" with their peers through TurfNet's magazine and online services.

"A forward-looking superintendent is doing himself a disservice in terms of professional development," says McCormick, "if he's not functionally proficient with a computer.

"If you have to, you should spend your own money and take your own time to learn how to use a computer. You're really lost today if you don't know the rudimentary basics."

The number of green industry organizations with online capabilities is expected to grow as trade associations go online, suppliers like John Deere begin to offer customer services and product information online, and the Environmental Protection Agency disseminates its reams of information via personal computers.

According to the Readex research, LM readers frequently use their computers to access technical/agronomic information (14 percent of all respondents), most of which is available through their state universities' computer systems. Eleven percent of our readers use computers to send and receive electronic mail ("e-mail"), and an additional eight percent use the computers to find out more about the products they use, including pesticide label information. E-mail use is more common among grounds managers at parks, schools and colleges (24 percent) than anywhere else in the green industry.

### Labor changes

English-speaking males between the ages of 21 and 65 historically have comprised the bulk of the green industry workforce. But, according to some surprising numbers from Readex, that has changed.

A "traditional" labor force no longer exists in the green

**NON-TRADITIONAL LABOR %**

|                      | <b>GOLF COURSES</b> | <b>GROUNDS MANAGERS</b> | <b>LANDSCAPE CONTRACTORS</b> | <b>LAWN CARE</b> | <b>INDUSTRY AVERAGES</b> |
|----------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|------------------|--------------------------|
| Non-English speaking | 5.3%                | 2.7%                    | 12.3%                        | 5.6%             | 8.2%                     |
| Female               | 13.9%               | 15.9%                   | 11.0%                        | 9.5%             | 12.3%                    |
| Age 65+              | 7.2%                | 2.6%                    | 1.7%                         | 1.1%             | 3.6%                     |
| Students             | 30.1%               | 28.9%                   | 22.9%                        | 21.2%            | 25.8%                    |
| <b>TOTALS</b>        | <b>56.5%</b>        | <b>50.1%</b>            | <b>47.9%</b>                 | <b>37.4%</b>     | <b>50.0%</b>             |

industry: exactly half of all employees are either non-English-speaking, female, aged 65 or more, or part-time students.

Most (25.8 percent) are students. But non-English-speaking workers and female employees are showing significant gains. Almost one in eight people involved in the industry is female (12.3 per-

cent), and about one in 12 doesn't speak English (8.2 percent). Golf courses are the biggest employers of students (30.1 percent) and older people (7.2 percent), while park and school grounds managers have more females (15.9 percent) in their employ, and landscape contractors hire the most non-English-speaking workers (12.3 percent).

Labor, incidentally, is still the biggest cost of doing business in the green industry: paychecks use up four of every 10 budget dollars. Park and school maintenance is the most labor-intensive with 56.9 percent of every dollar spent on labor. Golf course labor stands at 47.0 percent, lawn care labor at 37.1 percent, and landscape contracting labor at 35.0 percent.

**Contractor dollars**

Readers of LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT control more than \$25 billion every year.

The largest segment reached by this magazine is landscape contracting, with more than 20,000 readers. Not surprisingly, then, the landscape segment is the biggest in terms of dollars, too. Average landscape contracting revenues nationwide—from the Readex survey, projected to LM's landscape circulation—are \$11.9 billion.

Lawn care revenues projected to total LCO circula-

tion of 7,000+ is \$4.1 billion. Total operating budgets for golf course employees who read LM (nearly 17,000 of them) are about \$7 billion, and operating budgets for the nearly 5,000 grounds managers who read LM are projected to be about \$2.3 billion.

Not surprisingly, golf course superintendents are the best-paid readers of LM, with average annual salaries of \$54,100. Both landscape contractors and lawn care operators make about \$47,700 a year. Grounds managers, who average \$42,400 a year, however, can take heart: according to past LM surveys, they are the best-compensated market segment in terms of benefits and incentives.

The lawn care and landscape segments reported somewhat disappointing profit levels in 1995.

However, the companies that were profitable were *really* profitable. The 47 percent of landscape companies that reported profits averaged 17.4 percent, and the 54 percent of LCOs who reported profits averaged 19.3 percent.

**Survey parameters**

One thousand-seventy questionnaires were mailed to LM readers this past spring. The margin of error for percentages based on 613 usable responses (57% response rate) is ±3.9% at the 95% confidence level.

Responses were tallied, and are verifiable through, Readex, Inc., Stillwater, Minn.

## 12 ways to master the winds of change

1. View change as a challenge. Convert fear into energy.
2. Build commitment among employees.
3. Stay committed to your goals.
4. Know when to control—and when to let go.
5. Bounce back from setbacks.
6. Be optimistic.
7. Use humor to ease the tension.
8. Learn from your mistakes.
9. Maintain perspective, and deal with events in order of importance.
10. Tune the body with regular exercise.
11. Build your confidence.
12. Communicate, and help others to "master the winds of change," too.

—Source: "Business Beat," November, 1994

# Labor woes cause industry shift

by RON HALL / Senior Editor



**DAVIS:** Give quality employees a reason to stay.

**C**ontinued low unemployment, good news for the U.S. economy, is making it tough for the green industry to find reliable labor this season.

Contractors, in particular, aren't waiting for good workers to find them. They're actively recruiting employees, and sometimes—our survey shows—they have to recruit outside of the traditional young/white/male labor market.

There are probably many reasons for this, but one of

them might be the demise of the family farm. There just aren't that many young people familiar with, or eager to do, manual labor. That's what Joe Munie of Munie Outdoor Services, near St. Louis, believes.

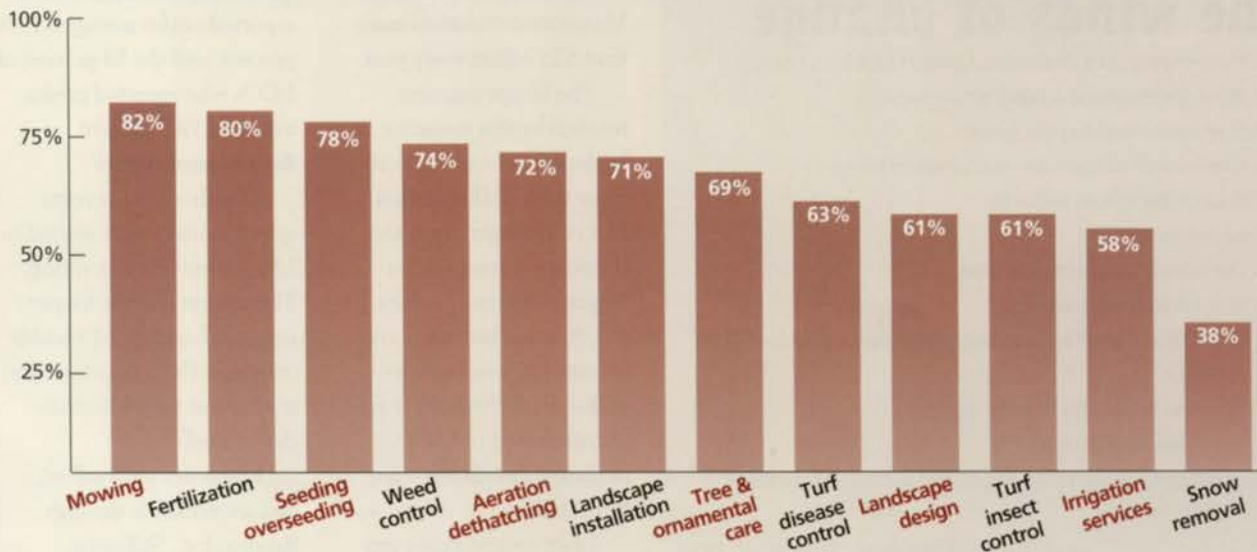
"When we started our company, we were able to get some people with a farm background. We don't see that segment of the labor force anymore," says Munie.

The problem is most acute for entry-level positions. Many potential employees in that particular job pool appear

**REEVE:** "People want to be challenged."



## SERVICES PERFORMED



## STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

### ANNUAL INCOME

|                             |                 |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| Golf course superintendents | \$54,100        |
| Landscape contractors       | \$42,400        |
| Lawn care operators         | \$47,700        |
| Grounds managers            | \$47,700        |
| <b>INDUSTRY AVERAGE</b>     | <b>\$49,600</b> |

*"For four or five years it was fairly easy to get help. This year we're seeing a tight labor market."*

*— Landon Reeve*

ently feel that there are less strenuous ways to make \$6.50 to \$7.00 an hour, which is about the industry starting average.

But both contractors and other segments of the industry, including professional application companies, are on the lookout for strong managers. These are in short supply, too, our survey suggests.

The Washington D.C. labor market may or may not be typical across the nation. But in 1996, that market has more jobs than people to fill them.

"For four or five years it was fairly easy to get help. This year we're seeing a tight labor market," says Landon Reeve IV, whose Chapel Valley Landscape has two locations in the D.C./Baltimore market.

"I think the issue of labor is an on-going problem. The main thing that we have to do as a company is to try very hard to keep people," he adds.

"We have to create an environment where our people have something to achieve. People want to be challenged."

Reflecting the findings in our survey, Chapel Valley Landscape, like other contractors, hires and retains an increasingly larger percentage of non-English speaking employees, typically Hispanic.

Tom Davis, president of Bozzuto Landscaping Company, Upper Marlboro, Md., says that staffing his landscape company—the fourth largest in metro D.C.—is a two-pronged effort. First, you attract the quality employee. Then you have a plan to retain the quality employee.

#### **His company finds employees by:**

- ▶ offering present employees incentives for bringing in other good workers,
- ▶ advertising in trade magazines,
- ▶ recruiting at universities,
- ▶ participating in field days,

### Superintendents' pay is highest in green industry

Salaries of golf course superintendents have increased \$4,800 over the past two years, according to statistics from the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America.

In 1993, the average supers' salary was \$44,500, based on a 1993 Salary Report; in 1995, that figure had risen to \$49,300, based on a 1995 Compensation and Benefits Report.

▶ as a last resort, advertising in local newspapers.

#### **To keep good employees, his company relies on:**

- ▶ careful hiring and screening,
- ▶ competitive wages,
- ▶ weekly training,
- ▶ English/Spanish tutoring,
- ▶ regular employee recognition,
- ▶ an "open-door" management philosophy,
- ▶ periodic company "fun" events,
- ▶ incentive programs based on meeting quality and

production goals,

▶ attempting to reduce off-season layoffs.

"We want to remain a company that new employees would want to come to, and our existing employees would like to stay a part of," says Davis.

Landon Reeve and Tom Davis met with members of the Turf and Ornamentals Communicators Association recently, and talked about labor.

# What they're saying out there...

## LAWN/LANDSCAPE

### ON BUSINESS EVOLUTION...

Charlie Racusin, Environmental Landscape Services, Houston, Texas:

Racusin is a realist who always looks for ways to attract new customers, which he says is essential in highly competitive markets.

"Today, landscaping has become, like many businesses, a commodity," explains Racusin. "Customers can buy it anywhere. So many people in this business today are shaking the same trees. They are telling the same story and writing up the same brochures. I see most landscape contractors as exceptionally competitive pricewise



Messina: Customer service goes "one step beyond reasonable."

because they don't have anything different to offer.

"What was best in 1972 wouldn't be the best today. Technology has improved, systems have improved, clients have become better educated and more sophisti-

cated, and they understand the work better and they demand excellence at a real competitive price. Everyone has gotten better, so you'd better be able to deliver something better or you've got no extra sizzle on your steak."

**ON HOMEOWNERS...** Ken Thomas, Landscape Techniques, Alpharetta, Georgia:

Thomas realizes the economic facts of life that often face new homeowners in higher-priced housing developments. "The people who are paying \$150,000 to \$200,000 for homes don't have a lot of extra income for landscaping because they are buying as much house as they can afford," says Thomas. "But

if we can catch up with them in three or four years, they'll be ready to spend some money, if the neighborhood is landscape-conscious.

"You get into the \$350,000 range and up, and those people are more likely to buy more initial landscaping."

**ON SERVICE...** Larry Messina, Lawn Cure of Southern Indiana, Jeffersonville, Indiana:

Messina adheres faithfully to the cornerstone of success.

"I preach service," he claims. "If a customer calls, we're on their lawns in 24 hours. When it comes to satisfying customers, we go one step beyond reasonable."

"This business is the lifeblood of our existence. To lose a customer is almost like an insult...[even though] 75 to 80 percent of the reasons a person cancels are the kind of things that are out of our control."

**ON HIRING...** Chris Senske, Senske Tree & Lawn, Kennewick, Washington:

These days, when it's getting harder to find good help, Senske's company has been fortunate to draw some of the best, but he's modest in his self-appraisal.

"Getting good employees has very little to do with my talent," he says. "It's mostly

### OPERATING COSTS

|                          | GOLF COURSES | GROUNDS MANAGERS | LANDSCAPE CONTRACTORS | LAWN CARE | INDUSTRY AVERAGES |
|--------------------------|--------------|------------------|-----------------------|-----------|-------------------|
| LABOR                    | 47.0%        | 56.9%            | 35.0%                 | 37.1%     | 41.7%             |
| OVERHEAD                 | 18.0%        | 10.9%            | 25.5%                 | 24.1%     | 21.3%             |
| EQUIPMENT                | 12.1%        | 14.8%            | 16.0%                 | 14.8%     | 14.6%             |
| FERTILIZERS & PESTICIDES | 11.9%        | 6.7%             | 7.2%                  | 13.8%     | 9.9%              |
| OTHER (INC. PROFIT)      | 10.0%        | 10.75            | 16.3%                 | 10.2%     | 12.6%             |

# STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

the abilities and drive of the people at Senske that make it a fun place to work and a successful business.

"It's been a lot of luck at finding great people, I think. I don't have any particular prescription. We don't pay as much as other industries, though we try to be competitive within our industry. So there has to be something else—the environment—that makes it a pleasant place to work."

## GOLF/GROUNDS

### ON THE GROWTH OF GOLF...

Bruce Williams, CGCS, Bob-O-Link Golf Course, Highland Park, Ill.:

One of the industry's leaders, Williams always looks at the big picture.

"Golf encompasses so many more things than just 'the green industry,'" says Williams. "As the population grows, so too does the game. We have to orient more people to the game, teach more people the game."

"All the associations need to work together to provide quality golf at affordable prices. There's tremendous cooperation between the allied associations and golf. We are all on the same page. There are some things for which we compete, but they are minor versus the things we are in concert on."

"Architects have to work to design maintainable golf courses that can be played in a reasonable amount of time.



Smith: More hydraulic mowers.

"We need a good complement of public and private facilities, and get people starting at an early age to understand etiquette, the rules of the game and the environmental aspects. It's harder to change people's opinions in mid-life."

**ON NATURAL AREAS...** Alan Culver, Mahoney Golf Course, Lincoln, Nebraska:

"Prairiegrass (little

bluestem, big bluestem and switchgrass) is being seeded in out-of-play areas that don't require a lot of mowing, fertilizer and water. We don't know if it's going to work. It's like an experiment, but it worked out at Highlands, one of the other Lincoln public courses. I'm putting in four acres that will be a different look and take some areas out of mowing."

**Bruce Williams:** "There's a lot of science versus emotion. We have people speaking on emotion [on what golf 'does to the environment']. There's factual information available on golf courses as wildlife habitats, and the positive benefits wetlands provide to a golf course. Data from universities show how a golf course can enhance the environment. GCSAA is working in schools to share that."

**ON GOLFERS...** Jean Esposito, Hinckley Hills Golf Course, Hinckley, Ohio:

A reality of golf is... golfers. Esposito often gets critiques from players who don't fully understand the realities of turf management and turf science.

"Customers are more critical once they see the television," says Esposito. "They don't realize that most courses don't have the budget to look like Augusta National."

"People are always trying to push me toward lower cutting heights. We mow our greens at  $\frac{3}{16}$  of an inch, our fairways at  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch. We used to mow our greens at  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch. At one time, we mowed our fair-

## PRODUCT PURCHASES IN 1995 by Landscape Management Readers

|                                                          | % OF SAMPLE PURCHASING | MEAN PURCHASE | PROJECTION TO READERSHIP |
|----------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|---------------|--------------------------|
| CONTROL PRODUCTS (including fertilizers)                 | 93%                    | \$19,000      | \$811 million            |
| MOWERS (reel & rotary)                                   | 67%                    | \$20,400      | \$627 million            |
| OTHER EQUIPMENT (hand powered, sprayers, etc.)           | 87%                    | \$17,200      | \$683 million            |
| VEHICLES (heavy trucks & pick-ups)                       | 41%                    | \$36,000      | \$678 million            |
| SNOW REMOVAL PRODUCTS                                    | 29%                    | \$5,010       | \$66 million             |
| MISCELLANEOUS (seed, nursery stock, sod, software, etc.) | 93%                    | n/a           | n/a                      |

# STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

ways at  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch, but the drought a couple years ago forced us back to one inch."

## ON GOLF COURSE

**MAINTENANCE...** Tim Smith of Hawks Nest Golf Club, Creston, Ohio, sees these trends:

► Mowing with hydraulic equipment.

► Narrower (8-foot rather than 18-20 feet) tractor bridges because the tractors are smaller.

► More "links look" with wildflowers and fescues and just letting them grow.

► Tapered creeks that we can run equipment down to the edge on.

► Planting trees so you can maintain around them.

**ON TECHNOLOGY...** Brad Kocher, Pinehurst Country Club, Pinehurst, North Carolina:

"I would say the trend is still toward more maintenance, to a degree," says Kocher. "A lot of that can be

done without a negative impact on the environment by using better mowers, better frequency, lighter weight units. The chemical companies will continue to work on products that you use less—if less is better.

"All those sorts of things that show there's an interest in technology. Any superintendent would love to not have to treat things, or bother with insects and fungus. I'm not sure that a lot of our maintenance practices cause that to happen; there seems to be a very, very minor correlation."

Don Aderman, mechanic for Stillwater (Minn.) Country Club: Aderman sees what can happen to equipment over time, and always keeps his eyes open for innovations that will save on repair time, work and money.

► The hydraulic drive

## TYPES OF CONTROL PRODUCTS PURCHASED BY FACILITY TYPE, 1995

| (% of respondents) | GOLF COURSES | GROUND MANAGERS | LANDSCAPE CONTRACTORS | LAWN CARE | (WEIGHTED) TOTAL |
|--------------------|--------------|-----------------|-----------------------|-----------|------------------|
| FERTILIZERS        | 96%          | 85%             | 87%                   | 90%       | 91%              |
| HERBICIDES         | 91%          | 83%             | 69%                   | 79%       | 80%              |
| INSECTICIDES       | 83%          | 63%             | 60%                   | 65%       | 69%              |
| FUNGICIDES         | 90%          | 42%             | 48%                   | 51%       | 63%              |
| NONE OF THESE      | 6%           | 1%              | 8%                    | 9%        | 7%               |
| AVG. AMT. SPENT    | \$28,100     | \$29,300        | \$12,500              | \$13,900  | \$20,400         |

## TYPES OF MOWERS PURCHASED BY FACILITY TYPE, 1995

| (% OF RESPONDENTS)   | GOLF COURSES | GROUND MANAGERS | LANDSCAPE CONTRACTORS | LAWN CARE | (WEIGHTED) TOTAL |
|----------------------|--------------|-----------------|-----------------------|-----------|------------------|
| WALK-BEHIND ROTARIES | 27%          | 45%             | 50%                   | 42%       | 40%              |
| RIDING ROTARIES      | 39%          | 46%             | 28%                   | 8%        | 34%              |
| PTO-DRIVEN ROTARIES  | 12%          | 24%             | 12%                   | 11%       | 13%              |
| PTO-DRIVEN REELS     | 9%           | 6%              | 0%                    | 1%        | 4%               |
| WALK-BEHIND REELS    | 31%          | 7%              | 6%                    | 4%        | 15%              |
| RIDING REELS         | 53%          | 13%             | 3%                    | 2%        | 21%              |
| NONE OF THESE        | 22%          | 30%             | 31%                   | 39%       | 29%              |
| AVG. AMT. SPENT      | \$30,200     | \$12,100        | \$8,600               | \$24,600  | \$19,000         |



## STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

mowers are more trouble-free than the belt-drives," says Aderman. "Belts will wear and stretch. The hydraulics are less time consuming to maintain. Good record keeping helps superintendents decide what equipment to get next; it lets the super know if it's time to get rid of a machine; maybe it's costing too much."

Aderman mixes a colorant in with mower oils. "That way, we can tell whether it's engine oil or hydraulic oil that's leaking," says Aderman. The colorant is available from a local auto dealer.

**Jerry Coldiron, Boone Links/Lassing Pointe Golf Courses, Florence, Ky.:**

Coldiron recently tried a tool he had long wanted to use, and found it solved two problems at once.

"We had 22 inches of rain in the last six weeks (as of June 18). The Floyd MacKay drill alleviated some compaction and really helped dry out the greens. The tapered

Indoors, Coldiron is taking advantage of new communications tools

"I probably use 'e-mail' daily," asserts Coldiron. "The guys who aren't taking advantage of 'e-mail' are missing the boat. I know nothing about computers, but I can peck out



**Kocher: More maintenance offset by better equipment.**

a paragraph of electronic mail [to get in touch with an industry colleague or find an answer to a particular turfgrass question]."

**ON HIRING...** Coldiron admits "it's tougher" to find reliable help, but he's come up with

looking for 40-hour weeks; most are kids whose parents don't want them working 40 hours.

"This day and age is different than 10 years ago," claims Coldiron. "The last three years we've struggled with labor, trying to keep up with the McDonald's wages. We have a seasonal equipment operator for \$7 an hour. Another seasonal laborer, 'Jack-of-all trades' who we pay just under \$6.

"We also recruited two full-time guys who have degrees in turfgrass, one from Rutgers, another from Eastern Kentucky."

Coldiron strives to impart in all his workers the goals listed in the Boone County mission statement, something that might be rare among golf courses. It's a values-centered statement that focuses on the "Golden Rule" of treating everyone as you would like to be treated; listening; and always looking for ways to improve.

**ON THE WEATHER...** Casey Crittenden, CGCS, Beatrice Country Club, Beatrice, Neb.: "It all started in the spring of 1995," remembers Crittenden, whose course recently achieved Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Certification.

"We had extremely wet conditions, then heat and humidity which promoted disease and weed infestation. Then it was a dry fall and a cold, open winter in this area. Now we're back to 95 degrees; pythium weather came



**Mitchell: "An unusual year and a half."**

overnight. So you have to be flexible to adapt to the weather. Stay on top of weather information. The weather forecast will tell you what you can and can not do."

**Robert V. Mitchell, CGCS, The Greenbrier, White Sulphur Springs, WV:** "It's been a very unusual year and a half, getting golfers around the course, regardless of wetness. We never close the golf course. We went to lightweight fairway mowers, to get over wet ground without making tracks. It saved our life!

"As far as the weather changing our management practices, we had to cut when we could, spray a little bit more. We had a run of red thread. But it's hard getting out to spray when it's so wet. Tees are growing profusely!"

Even in ideal weather, Mitchell says, "the days of the carte blanche pesticide applications are behind us. We've made a concerted effort to reduce [control product] use."

—Jerry Roche; Terry McIver

***"I probably use 'e-mail' daily. The guys who aren't taking advantage of 'e-mail' are missing the boat."***

—Jerry Coldiron

bits bring up very little material. It did a super job.

"We also bought a Toro plug pulverizer. It disintegrates the plugs on fairways into topdressing, then we go over it with a harrow. We also have a new core harvester."

some "part-time" remedies.

"We've been more efficient in the way of seasonal and part-time guys," explains Coldiron.

"We have 15-20 hours a week-type guys. They're not