

Lawn care season starts slow but demand still strong

At any given time in the United States, there are droughts and floods, and regions that enjoy blue skies and scattered soft warm showers.

There are communities that are bursting with new industry and opportunity, but many more whose economies are just chugging along.

This country is so big that no single climate or economic condition can contain it. In a sense, that's true for the green industry too.

While the challenges that we face in the green industry are often similar, our language is filled with regional concerns and observations.

For instance, snow storms pounded the eastern seaboard again and again this past winter, and missed much of the north. As a result, companies offering snow removal were busier in Washington D.C. and Baltimore than, say, in Chicago and Detroit.

And when drought gripped the Southwest and the Southern Plains early in 1996, states surrounding the Great Lakes sloshed their way through a damp, dreary spring.

"I think that it rained 62 of 70 days," said John Cruse, Jr., Easy Lawn, who spoke to us in mid June. "The problem



was that we couldn't get done what we had to do."

Cruse in southwest Ohio said that customer demand in 1996 seemed high. "We felt like it was going to be a good year, and we still think it will be."

It wasn't until the first week in June that Brent Flory's Freedom Lawns, near Lafayette, Ind., caught up.

"This spring about wore us out. But, things are really going good right now," said Flory.

"I suspected that going into the spring we were going to have a lot of calls. We were unseasonably hot last summer, and this past winter we didn't get a lot of moisture.

"There were a lot of people whose lawns were just destroyed. But with the amount of rain we've gotten this spring, a lot of these lawns are recovering quite well," added Flory.

Linda Marsh of Classy Grass, Inc., said that demand for her company's services in

Small and large markets were effected by the changeable spring weather, causing companies to play catch up and do their best to maintain efficiency.

by RON HALL / Senior editor

and around Peoria, Ill., started strong. "We just need the weather to cooperate." She said her lawn care company suffered 13 rain days in May.

Eric Fink's Golden Valley Lawn Service in Clinton, Mo., battled through the wet spring but Eric, himself, got laid up in an auto accident. He said he will have to take it easy through the summer. His three employees should be busy all summer, said Fink.

"In our small market we have to do everything we can to get and keep customers, and we do," said Fink. "If that means we have to help clean somebody's gutter, or sweep a walk, we will. We're full service. That's what our customers want."

A very dry winter, and a cold spring, topped by an April snowstorm, pushed everything back several weeks in the Abilene, Tex., market, said Dan Haught of Master-Scapes. Finally several soaking rains in early June replenished ground moisture there.

"We're still about half of what we should be," added Rich Comfort, Genesis Lawn Care, Austin, Tex. "It seemed like we went from winter right to summer."

Comfort added that "everything seemed to be on a time delay. Fortunately, everything's fallen into place, and we're on schedule. The season looks like it's shaping up pretty nice."

Jim MacHahon, Coronis Landscaping, Nashua, NH, said that New England's winter and spring weather was "crazy."

Winter gave one huge blast with a mid-April snowstorm that stole a week of production from Coronis Landscaping and added to the region's record-breaking total.

"But, we've been busy, busy, busy. Our customers kept hearing about the record snowfalls and about this being the worst winter ever, and they're pretty understanding," said MacHahon.