

Congress and USDA cut Beltsville's grass

by JERRY ROCHE/Editor-in-Chief

Effective October 1st, the National Turfgrass Evaluation Program (NTEP) will collapse for lack of money, if the United States Department of Agriculture has its way.

When Congress cut back its portion of the federal budget, the USDA's Agricultural Research Service (ARS) said it would stop funding the NTEP, according to national program coordinator Kevin Morris.

The NTEP is a nationwide network of research programs that evaluates the adaptability of different turfgrass cultivars to local environmental and climatic conditions, and to different management regimes. Each year, subscribers can receive full reports on all the major varieties entered in the trials for a



Changes have to come from the U.S. Congress, says NTEP director Kevin Morris, shown here on the USDA turf plots in Beltsville, Md.

nominal fee. LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT also runs a condensed version of the reports in its popular "Pocket Seed Guide" every July.

According to government officials, President Clinton's administration and USDA officials, who are appointed by Clinton, consider the NTEP research low priority, and have eliminated it from the 1997 fiscal budget (starting October 1, 1996).

In a letter to NTEP constituents dated March 27th, Morris wrote:

"The good news is that there is still time to reverse this decision. Please contact your Congressional representatives immediately, telling them you support turfgrass research funding by USDA. Also, the following individuals within USDA need to hear from you: Secretary Dan Glickman, Dr. Floyd Horn and Dr. Edward Knipling."

However, in a note to LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT on April 4th, Morris was less optimistic:

"Hopefully, the USDA officials will know we are here. However, they most likely will not change their position. This will have to come from Congress."

The Golf Course Superintendents Association of America is exhorting its members to call the Capitol switchboard to contact legislators with support for the

NTEP. In its most recent "Government Relations Briefax," the GCSAA also suggested its members write their Congressional representatives. □

—The Capitol switchboard telephone is (202) 224-3121. To reach Kevin Morris for more information, phone (301) 504-5125 or e-mail him at kmorris@asrr.arsusda.gov

Southeast distributor to buy Lofts Seed

Budd Seed, Inc., a wholesale turfgrass seed and fertilizer distributor based in Winston-Salem, N.C., will purchase New Jersey-based Lofts Seed, Inc., one of the green industry's major suppliers of turfgrass seed since 1923.

According to Ken Budd, president and chief operating officer of Budd Seed, a mutually-agreed-upon purchase is expected on June 30th.

Budd Seed has distributed Lofts products for the last 15 years.

"We are their second- or third-largest customer," says Budd. "We're looking to expand" the Lofts' products further into the Southeast.

"We plan to run Lofts as it's been run for the past 15 years," says Budd. "It's a strong company, and we plan to continue with [turfgrass] breeding, research, production and distribution."

According to Budd, the Lofts Seed name will remain.

Budd Seed is a privately-held company that sells turfgrass seed to garden centers, golf courses and commercial turf care companies in the Carolinas, Tennessee, Kentucky, Virginia and West Virginia. It also distributes Andersons, Weaver and IMC fertilizers.

Budd says the purchase will combine the synergies of both companies in areas of financing, marketing and personnel.

Jon Loft, president and chief executive officer of Lofts Seed, is expected to retire, although Budd could not specify the date of Lofts' retirement.

Lofts developed and owns patents on more than 25 seed varieties such as Rebel II and Rebel III turf-type tall fescues, Palmer perennial ryegrass and Georgetown Kentucky bluegrass. The company has domestic branches and subsidiaries in Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Ohio, Oregon and Georgia. **LM**

—Terry McIver