

Ever wonder who will fund turfgrass research in the days ahead? So do some of the people doing that very research that helps fuel industry growth and product improvements.

"At almost all universities there have been enormous cutbacks," says one researcher who wants to remain anonymous. "In order to preserve faculty positions, a lot of the support services positions are being lost. Those are the people who take care of the farms, the technical people."

Some turf pros are even being asked to pay for their projects.

On the upside, there are grants here and there from industry to fund product research on behalf of the manufacturers of control products or equipment. But in between are the cracks through which fall jobs and individual research projects.

"The money for ag research is more than likely going to be coming from funds raised from state and regional turfgrass associations through conferences and trade shows,

and also through industry grants. The money coming from the USDA is going to be less and less," says Dr. Eliot Roberts of Rosehall Associates, Sparta, Tenn.

"With so many humanistic concerns higher on the list, the agricultural/turfgrass industry can well afford to provide the funds for turf research so federal funds can be used for humanistic concerns," says Roberts.

Turfgrass is becoming the USDA's poor cousin who has to look elsewhere for help.

As Jim Elgin, USDA national program leader for forage grasses told me, programs in food safety, human nutrition and environmental issues—\$26 million worth—are priority items. Which explains why Congress plans to eliminate the \$55,000 it gives to the National Turfgrass

Evaluation Program, this time for good.

"The [NTEP] program has matured, and has arrived at the point where it's capable of supporting its own needs," says Elgin.

NTEP receives more than \$600,000 from seed companies. The \$55,000 is a drop in the bucket, but Kevin Morris, NTEP director, believes the USDA and Congress are blind to the intangible benefits of NTEP support.

"We're trying to get them to understand we're good for them," says Morris. "I get a lot of national and international visitors here. To have a national program for research so close to D.C. makes sense."

Dr. Tim Murphy of the University of Georgia says the funding there is sufficient for now.

"We get pretty good support...from our state appropriation and some federal dollars the university uses for turf and ornamental research, extension and teaching.

"Within the state, our state associations, the Golf Course Superintendents Association, and the Georgia Turfgrass Association provide monies to the Georgia Turf Foundation, which in turn funds various projects and activities."

However, Murphy sees a trend at the federal and state levels in terms of cash support for salaries, physical plant expenses and the like. "Those funds will likely remain level or decrease. 'Level funding' is actually a cut, when inflation is factored in," Murphy explains.

The money is out there. Lofts Seed, for example, this year presented a generous \$670,000 in endowment/royalty money to Rutgers University and the University of Rhode Island, and another \$14,000 to the USGA.

Associations are indeed doing their part, through golf tournaments, scholarships or outright cash contributions, and it looks like more of that kind of support will be needed in the days ahead. Support research whenever you can. **LM**

What's your opinion on the state of research funding in the green industry? Write to us at 7500 Old Oak Blvd., Cleveland, Ohio 44130. Or e-mail to tmciver@advanstar.com

Research money: now you see it, now you don't



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