

Scotts buys Emerald Green

Acquisitions in the lawn care industry featured a couple new faces in October, as the Scotts Company, Marysville, Ohio, purchased a majority interest in Emerald Green Lawn Care.

Emerald Green serves 29,000 Midwest customers, and now anchors Scotts' efforts to grow its new Scotts Lawn Service Division. Specifically, Scotts says it wants to fill a void in the "premium" lawn care market, after the TruGreen/ChemLawn buy of Barefoot Grass.

"[TruGreen/ChemLawn's] strengths have always been in the broader lawn service market, not the premium end where Barefoot competed so successfully," says Mark Long, vice president of Scotts Lawn Service.

Scotts reports there is a 10.5 million-household market for lawn care, and any company that can satisfy customers will keep them for awhile.

"People usually don't shift back and forth between a lawn care service and do-it-yourself lawn care," believes Long. "They use a service for an average of five years, because they either don't have time or don't want to worry about caring for their lawn."

Great name recognition

Scotts also may benefit from the familiarity of having its products in virtually every garden center in America. It spends \$30 million in consumer advertising, and Scotts and Miracle-Gro products will be used to service customers' lawns.

Scotts reports that for the next two years it will establish and refine its marketing and operational strategies in several new markets, with a special focus on customer retention.

The strategy does not rule out further acquisitions, Scotts reports.

"Longer term, we believe Scotts is very well positioned to fill the premium segment of the lawn service industry and establish itself as the number one, premium national player in the market," says Long.

"Select company stores are switching over in 1998, to be called Scotts Lawn Care," says Gene Pool, owner of the Emerald Green franchise in Van Wert, Ohio. "The franchises, people like myself and 26 others, will continue to be called 'Emerald Green, Featuring Scotts Products.'"

Pool says he met with Mark Long recently, and believes the Scotts plan will work.

"I'm impressed with [Long]. I think he's a man of integrity and I think he's got the drive to make Scotts number 1 in 10 years," says Pool.

Jacklin patents endophyte

POST FALLS, ID.— Jacklin Seed Company has acquired the first patent for endophyte in all varieties of Kentucky bluegrass and related species, as well as creeping bentgrass, and says it expects to market an endophyte-enhanced product on the market within two years.

Endophyte is a natural plant protectant that exists in perennial ryegrass the fescues. Until recently, it has not occurred in Kentucky bluegrass or creeping bentgrass.

"Endophyte enables turfgrass to better reduce insects and diseases naturally, greatly reducing the need for chemical inputs on golf courses and other turf," reports the company.

The technique for introducing endophyte into these species through inoculation and hybridization was developed by researchers Doug Brede and Suichang Sun of Jacklin.

"This endophyte patent will completely change the way the turfgrass and turf maintenance business is conducted," says Doyle Jacklin, president of Jacklin Seed of Post Falls, Id. "It will greatly reduce the chemical applications turf professionals use to maintain a healthy, disease-free turf."

Jacklin reports it studied hundreds of thousands of genetic variations to develop the Kentucky bluegrass and creeping bentgrass endophytes. The new varieties were the result of more than 11 years of research.

Creeping bentgrass is used for the majority of golf course turf around the world. Kentucky bluegrass is the prime lawn grass throughout temperate regions.

Toro to build Dingo Digger

Dingo Digging Systems of Fort Mill, S.C. and The Toro Company of Bloomington, Minn., have announced a strategic partnership under which Toro will manufacture Dingo Digging System's landscape products under the Toro brand name for the North and South American markets. This partnership establishes the Toro SiteWork Systems product line. The Dingo name will remain on the flagship product under the Toro SiteWork Systems banner.

Dingo Digging Systems began to distribute its products in North America in 1995 under an agreement with Dingo MiniDiggers of Australia. The partnership with Toro allows for increased manufacturing and product availability in the Americas.

"I believe this agreement will have tremendous impact on the landscape contracting industry and I'm excited about its potential," says Roger Braswell, president of Dingo Digging Systems and Southern Tree and Landscape Companies, Charlotte, N.C.

"Toro's quality and excellence in manufacturing and distribution will quickly make this machine a mainstay of every contractor's business," says Braswell.

The Dingo is a compact utility machine with more than 30 attachments. Its compact size and maneuverability allows it to landscape areas that previously had to be done by hand. The 42-inch frame sits atop a four-wheeled base and can turn within its own radius. The operator stands on the rear of the machine and uses hand controls to power the attachments. The bucket is a standard attachment and other attachment options include an auger, trencher, tiller, leveler, cement mixer, rotary broom and back hoe.

The Dingo 220 will be manufactured at Toro's ISO 9000 certified facility in Tomah, Wisc. and offered through Toro's distributor partners. Dingo Digging Systems will continue to provide sales and marketing support.

The investment by Toro is the latest in the company's strategy to increase its market reach, says Chairman and CEO, Kendrick B. Melrose.

"We expect the partnership with Dingo," says Melrose, "combined with our existing business and the planned acquisition of Exmark Manufacturing and earlier alliances with Maruyama manufacturing for hand-held products and Bluebird International for aerators and other walk-behind products, to send a clear message to our customers that Toro is committed to being the leader in providing innovative equipment to landscape contractors to help increase their productivity."

[CLIPPINGS]

Minn. soil scientists need state o.k.

Soil scientists practicing certain procedures in Minnesota must now be licensed by the state.

Licenses are required to perform mapping; environmental cleanup projects; some land application projects; and septic system projects. Basic soil fertility testing is not included. Applications for licenses made before August 5, 1998 will be grandfathered and no exam will be required, provided that the applicant meets certain education and work experience criteria. For an application packet, call 612/296-2388.

Extension agents study issues

The first Urban Horticulture/Turf Study Tour, sponsored by RISE, PLCAA and TruGreen/Chem-Lawn through the National Association of County Agricultural Agents took place Oct. 4-9 in Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey and New York. RISE reports 20 agents participated in the tour. RISE's Allen James, Elizabeth Lawder and Fred Langley addressed the group on state legislative issues, media relations and industry issues. American Cyanamid hosted the group and presented a tour of its New Jersey facility.

Record quarter for Lesco

Lesco, Inc. reports record sales and earnings for the third quarter of 1997. Net income for the quarter ended Sept. 30 was a record \$4.4 million, an increase of 23.4 percent over third quarter 1996. Chairman William Foley credited West Coast expansion and the purchase of Tri Delta Fertilizer, and "positive growth in all channels of business" as key element in the improved earnings.

Md. turf council establishes fund

The Maryland Turfgrass Council Board of Directors has established the Maryland Turfgrass Fund in cooperation with the University of Maryland Foundation. The move is meant to invest the Council's funds for the best return, given the government's apathy toward turf programs. The Council established the fund with a \$100,000 donation. "In these days of decreased Federal and State funding, reports the Council, "it is becoming increasingly important for industry to meet the needs of research and advancements in our field. We are increasingly being asked to help fund research, scholarship programs and meet other educational needs."