

TPI optimistic

In the early 1960s, landscape contractors, golf course superintendents and other grounds professionals had few grass establishment options. If they wanted to seed or sprig, the number of improved varieties was limited. If they wanted sod, high labor demand was the only certainty, as producers were widely scattered and product quality varied.

A cycle that builds on success is very strong within today's turfgrass production industry, with an expanding number of options being a key element.

Variety in turf

Standard rolls and slabs of consistently high-quality sod are widely available, in an ever-expanding array of mixtures and blends. Big rolls, washed sod, thin-cut, thick-cut, custom-grown and unique harvesting, delivery and installation options all create and support a greater and greater use of turfgrass sod. Golf courses, sports fields and erosion control projects are all turning to sod because of its instant and certain result, with a known cost for quality. The use of sod on residential sites continues to increase for the same reasons. Concerns and increased awareness of potential environmental impacts are also contributing to the increased use as well because it does not require the large amounts of water,

fertilizer or pesticides associated with seeding.

Turfgrass Producers International (formed in 1967 as the American Sod Producers Association) is more the catalyst than the cause of these improvements. By offering a forum where producers and manufacturers can exchange ideas and information on a regular basis at meetings or through committees and publications, TPI members are better able to anticipate or react to new needs and requirements.

Today's ideas, tomorrow's reality

Yesterday's methods quickly become historical curiosities because the competitive nature of the turfgrass sod production industry requires that the producer must not only compete with fellow growers, but every other type of grass establishment as well. What's more, they have to do it on a cost and labor competitive basis, knowing that given sufficient time, their professional customers could grow high quality grass on their own and not require sod.

With nearly 1,000 members in 36 countries, TPI has become the preeminent source for information about the turfgrass sod industry, but its volunteer leaders and professional staff are already discussing how to further improve the industry.

One of the key components to this continued improvement will be a concerted and organized effort to better understand the needs of their customers, especially the professional segment. Asking questions, listening carefully to the answers and developing new solutions will be an on-going effort for TPI and all of its members. TPI and its members should individually and collectively be wise enough to recognize these new opportunities and brave enough to advance exciting new solutions.

—Fender is executive director of TPI, a position he has held since 1983.



Fender: industry improvements help make sod installation easier.

Sod. A little word that offers big advantages for turf managers. This association thinks positively in an age of environmental unrest.

By DOUG FENDER, Turfgrass Producers International

Fourteen past presidents of ASPA/TPI entertain during the group's 25th anniversary celebration in Chicago in 1992.

