

Let's talk turf with the Feds

Speak out for a new national turfgrass program that the U.S. Department of Agriculture's ARS (Agriculture Research Service) is starting. The program is in the discussion stages. Because turfgrass research always seems to get shunted aside when it comes to federal funds, this is the best time to give it all the support that we can.

The ARS is big

But, first a little about the ARS, the principal research agency of the USDA. With 8,000 employees, including 2,000 scientists, it conducts an incredible amount of agricultural research, primarily on crops of food and fiber. This involves 1,200 different projects in more than 100 locations around the country. While some of these projects focus on pasture and rangeland grasses, none deal exclusively with turfgrass.

Here's how we can help change that.

We better be there

This fall, the ARS will host a workshop to discuss the national turfgrass program, says Evert Byington, Ph.D., National Project Leader, Rangeland, Pasture and Forage Research.

If we want to have a say in the program, we better be there. When a date is set, we'll let you know

"We're inviting all sorts of people with an interest in turfgrass," says Byington. "It's open to the public, and we want people to express what they feel the research priorities should be. Out of that we will develop a strategic plan and start formulating what kinds of research we will do as funding becomes available."

Byington says that the ARS conducts research that

academia and the industry don't have the resources to tackle. Initially, the program will concentrate on the basic biology and genetics of turfgrasses. Later, it will examine turfgrass systems more broadly, issues like sustainable management and watershed modeling.

But there's one more thing that we can do.

Let them know

Let's contact our respective U.S. legislators and let them know that we feel this program is vital. A phone call or letter will get our point across—especially if we follow up with friendly reminders. Let's point out the importance of turfgrass to our industry and to the nation—its role in controlling erosion and ground water pollution, as well as its obvious importance to landscapes, playgrounds and sports fields.

"We'll be starting on the ground floor with this national program so we can build it the way it needs to be built," says Kevin Morris, executive director of the National Turfgrass Evaluation Program in Beltsville, MD, where the program will be headquartered.

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Those of us with a direct interest in turfgrass research should be at the Agricultural Research Service workshop and help give direction to the program.