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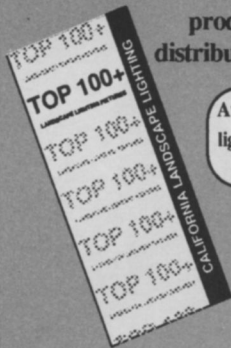




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## Managers wanted?

by E.T. Wandtke

■ Over this past winter, I was shocked by the number of companies I found are without a system for employee evaluations. Why can't a growing company find managers from within? Does your company have this problem? Do you have an effective employee evaluation system in place?

**Who to promote?**—To develop an effective employee evaluation system, remember three things:

**1) Make sure the system is two-sided.** If a manager is going to evaluate one of his employees, he too must be evaluated by the employee. The reason for this is that you can more effectively identify what areas in the company need work.

Suppose the branch manager says in an evaluation that a crew member doesn't meet the standards for acceptable work. Typically, this could be the result of not properly explaining what the standards are, or the crew member could be a poor worker. With a two-sided evaluation system in place, the crew member would have the opportunity to explain that perhaps he needs more training.

**2) Set measurable written goals for your employees.** If you don't convert your goals into measurable terms, you will never know when you have actually achieved them.

Often, I hear from employees that their manager has told them they will be evaluated on their work. But what does this mean? Is it based on how many days you don't show up for work? What exactly is a "good job"? What are you looking for when you evaluate the employee? Not telling your employees what you want, in specific terms, often results in mediocre performance.

**3) Provide employees with feedback.** How will someone know if they are not meeting goals unless you, the manager, provide some form of feedback? Set up regular meetings to discuss an employee's performance.

The sign of a poor manager is someone who fires an employee without ever telling him/her that he/she is not performing up to the desired level.

**Developing managers**—Once areas for development are identified for employees, companies often fail to develop a comprehensive plan of training to meet the employee's needs. Educational programs for potential managers in the green industry can be found at state or national conventions, in independent training programs, and through customized programs developed by industry consultants.

A formal development system for potential key managers can provide for the continued growth of your company and assure the owner that he or she will be able to fill future needs with responsible individuals. Failure to develop managers can strain the future growth of a company and result in lower profits, lower morale, and possible turnover of your best employees.

Now is the time to set up an effective employee evaluation system. It can benefit your employees short-term and your company long-term. Profits, efficiency, morale can all be improved.

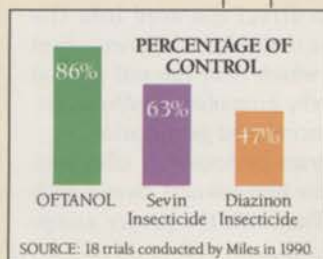
—The author is a principle in Wandtke & Associates, a management and marketing consulting firm. Write 2586 Oakstone Dr., Columbus, OH 43231 or phone (614) 891-3111 for more information.

# OFTANOL USERS KNOW THE BEST WAY TO OUTSMART GRUBS IS WITH A LITTLE EXTRA HOMEWORK.

Getting rid of grubs that attack your customers' lawns can be pretty tricky sometimes. Unfortunately, simply treating against these destructive pests doesn't always guarantee success.

But many lawn care operators have learned that all it takes to outsmart grubs is a little preparation—finding the right product and the right time of year to make the application. The product is OFTANOL Insecticide. Studies show that time after time, OFTANOL provides grub control. And delivers better control than other widely used products such as Sevin® and Diazinon Insecticides.

The right time to apply it? That will vary from region to region. But a good rule of thumb is



to treat with OFTANOL when grubs are at or near the surface. An easy way to check is by just pulling back a bit of sod and looking for an infestation. Or call your local Extension office to determine peak periods of grub feeding in your area.

These are, of course, just the basics of effective grub control. If you'd like to learn more about OFTANOL and its proper usage, contact your local Miles representative. Or just give us a call at (800) 842-8020. One of our trained pro-

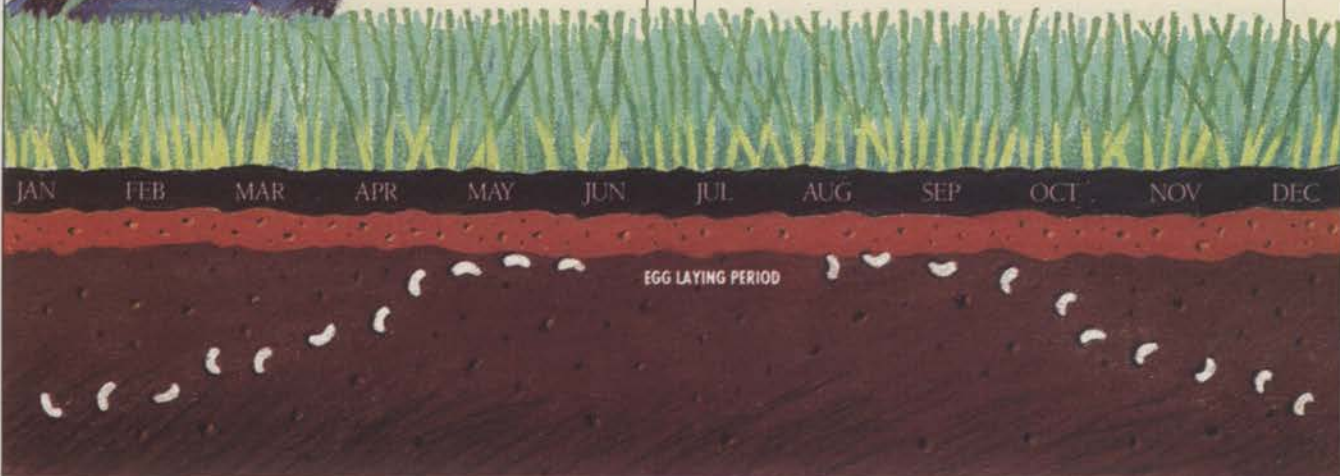
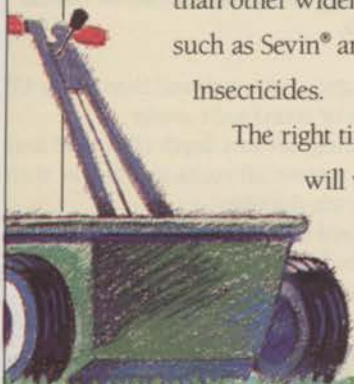
professionals will be standing by to answer your questions. Miles Inc., Specialty Products, Box 4913, Kansas City, MO 64120.

So why let grubs continue to test your patience when the easy answer is OFTANOL.



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## Tips on whether to reseed or renovate a client's lawn

by Bill Pound, Ph.D.  
The Ohio State Univ.

■ The lawn care operator/landscaper must decide whether a home lawn can be restored solely by applying seed and fertilizer, or whether complete renovation will give better results.

**Reseeding**—Drought damage alone seldom results in complete turfgrass loss, but it can cause a significant loss in turf density.

Seeding into established turfgrass can restore turfgrass density when it's been lost to adverse conditions. If at least 50 percent of the established turf survives, late summer/early fall reseeding is a viable option.

Kentucky bluegrass produces rhizomes and fills in voids. Generally, if the voids are the size of a softball or smaller, reseeding into Kentucky bluegrass turf isn't necessary. Reseeding will, however, help fill the voids faster if that's important.

If the primary turf species is perennial ryegrass or tall fescue, reseeding is usually necessary to improve density. The individual plants of these two species can increase in size through tilling, but neither possess the rhizoming capabilities like Kentucky bluegrass.

**Overseeding:** Overseeding with a drop or broadcast spreader is the most popular—and least expensive—way to introduce seed into an established lawn. Results improve after aerating or dethatching. This exposes the underlying soil for better seed/soil contact.

Still, the biggest drawback to overseeding is the low percentage of seeds which germinate and become established. Unless a significant amount of soil is exposed before seeding, the percentage of seed which ultimately establishes is less than with slice seeding, spot seeding or total renovation.

**Slice seeding:** Slice seeding is also per-

formed with only minor disturbance of the established turf.

Slit or slice seeders use vertical blades that cut small grooves in the soil. A disk is then used to direct the seed into the grooves. Some units also have press wheel attachments which firm the soil around the seed, thereby promoting seed/soil contact and enhancing seed germination.

Most turfgrass professionals offer slice seeding because homeowners cannot do it themselves. They lack the proper equipment.

**Spot seeding:** Spot seeding is usually performed on small, selected areas of the lawn where at least 50 percent of the turfgrass has been lost. Rake or otherwise physically remove dead grass and any thatch to expose the underlying soil.

The soil should be slightly raked/tilled before seeding. Then the seed and soil should be gently mixed. Using straw mulch helps preserve soil moisture, especially if irrigation is limited.

If large areas of the lawn have been lost, however, total renovation is probably the best option.

**Total renovation**—Renovation is also the best answer to too much thatch, infestations of perennial grass weeds or if the homeowner wants to upgrade the cultivar selections in the lawn.

Here are the steps in total renovation:

- 1) Conduct a soil test.
- 2) Make any necessary corrective nutrient applications or pH amendments.
- 3) Apply a non-selective, systemic herbicide to control all existing vegetation. (When the areas targeted for renovation contain perennial grass weeds, enough time should be allocated to make, if necessary, a second herbicide application to assure good control.)
- 4) Prepare the area for seeding/sodding after waiting seven days following the last application of herbicide. If excessive thatch layers (greater than one-half inch) exist, remove them. If not, mow the dead grass



**Total lawn renovation is one of the best ways to defeat excessive thatch buildup.**

to a height of one inch and then either till the area or access a slit-seeder.

If tilling, till to a depth of at least four inches, remove all rocks and debris, then finely grade the site.

5) Seed the desired species using either a drop or broadcast spreader, going in two directions.

6) Lightly mix, incorporating the seed into the soil.

7) Lightly roll the site.

8) Apply mulches such as straw, especially if irrigation is limited or the potential for erosion exists.

9) Starter fertilizer with an analysis ratio of 1-1-1 up to a 1-2-1 should be applied either at seeding or within two weeks after.

10) Irrigate as needed.

11) Begin mowing when grass grows to 2 or 2 1/2 inches.

12) Delay herbicide use until the following spring.

—The author is a turfgrass extension specialist in agronomy with The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio.



# Poly fertilizers last longer, give more control

## Manufacturers claim ability to 'dial in' turfgrass fertility prescriptions with polymer-coating science.

■ Let's assume there is an ideal turfgrass fertilizer. Most of us would like it to:

✓Release nutrients at a rate matching the demand of the turfgrass—the precise amounts of nutrients needed by the turfgrass, when they're needed.

✓Provide a rapid green-up but continue to keep turfgrass plants healthy and green without surges in growth. This would reduce mowing frequency, and also reduce the amount of grass clippings.

✓Eliminate (or at least lessen) the possibility of nutrients leaching into groundwater.

✓Provide season-long nutrient release with a single application. This would reduce application costs.

✓Be easy to apply.

It's not likely a single product can ever accomplish this, considering the different species of turfgrass, climatic/geographic variations, and the different demands we place on turfgrass.

Three fertilizer manufacturers, however, claim they're taking a step in this direction by manufacturing and marketing polymer-coated turfgrass fertilizer products. These products have been introduced to the professional turf market within the last 18 months. The three suppliers are:

- Grace-Sierra, Milpitas, Calif.: Once Season Long Turf & Landscape Fertilizers,
- Pursell Industries, Sylacauga, Ala.:

Polygon Polymer Coated Fertilizers, and

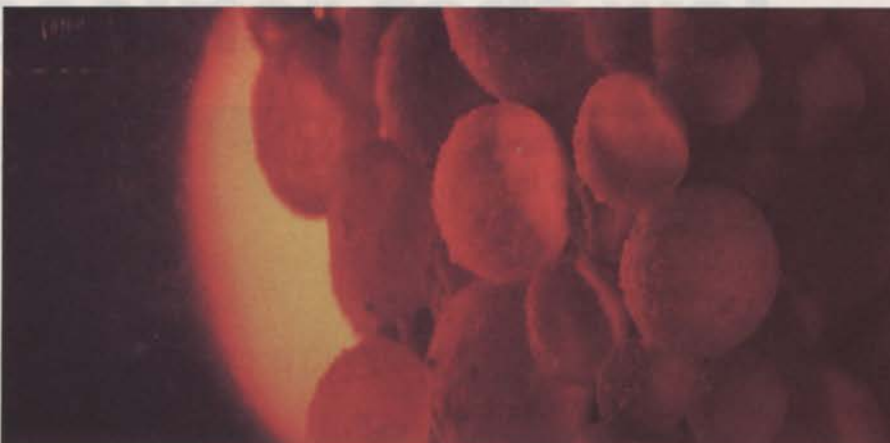
- The O.M. Scott & Sons Company, Marysville, Ohio: ProTurf Fertilizers with Poly-S.

**It's the coating**—Each of these suppliers designed unique features into its coating technology. It's these coating systems that allow them to program in products with an almost unlimited range of nutrient-release capabilities, say these suppliers.

This is mostly done in the manufactur-

erates the relatively impermeable polymer coating, and the nutrients, now in solution, diffuse back through the coating (about half the thickness of a human hair) and into the soil. As the temperature rises (and turfgrass plants are growing), more nutrients are released. Suppliers say these products are not dependent on microbes to release nutrients.

Polymer-coated fertilizer granules can be manufactured in several sizes, typically



## Polymer-covered granules and prills—the future of coated fertilizers?

*Photo courtesy of Grace-Sierra*

ing process by varying the thickness of the coating. Grace-Sierra touts its Osmocote resin coating system, Pursell its RLC (reactive layers coating) system, and Scotts its two-tier (sulfur and polymer) Poly-S system. That's the big advantage of these coated products, say the three companies. The release of nutrients can be more precisely controlled. The release of nutrients can be lengthened.

There must be moisture, at least initially, to get the process started. Moisture pen-

micro, mini and regular-sized. Also, some now in the marketplace have been blended with prescribed amounts of uncoated fertilizer materials. The uncoated granules release nutrients soon after application for the initial turfgrass response, while the coated granules release nutrients over time.

Polymer-coated turfgrass fertilizers will also be sold to homeowners through mass merchandisers like K-Mart, Wal-Mart and Ace Hardware, as well as independent lawn and garden outlets.

—Ron Hall

## Companies invest big bucks in polymer lines

■ Seen one fertilizer plant, seen 'em all? Not by a long shot.

Late this spring LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT visited The O.M. Scott & Sons at Marysville, Ohio. Then in early summer we visited Pursell Industries in Sylacauga, Ala.

We weren't allowed to take photographs of any of the production equipment in either plant. Some of this technology is proprietary.

The lines are, from appearances anyway, similarly designed, containing hundreds of feet of duct work and chutes, and large

drums where the coatings are sprayed onto nutrients. There are other similarities. Operations at both plants are computer controlled. These are enclosed systems where product never touches the ground.

The Poly-S production line represents part of the \$15 million Scotts is spending to upgrade its fertilizer manufacturing capabilities. Pursell's Polygon manufacturing plant is brand new. It's to get a second production line later this year. John H. Detrick, who heads Pursell's technical department, half jokingly describes it as a plastic manu-

facturing plant. "The plastic just happens to be going onto fertilizer," he says.

Before investing in these 1/4-mile production lines, both companies built much smaller facilities for test purposes—this after extended agronomic testing of the polymer-coated fertilizer products. Officials at both facilities say their product is regularly sampled for quality and uniformity, even though the most noticeable aspect of both of their operations is the surprisingly few technicians they require for operation.

—R.H.



# LAWN CARE INDUSTRY

## Prince George's revives county pre-notification law that refuses to die

**Most lawn and landscape professionals say the law is unnecessary.**

■ The Prince George's County, Md., pesticide pre-notification law has reared its ugly head again.

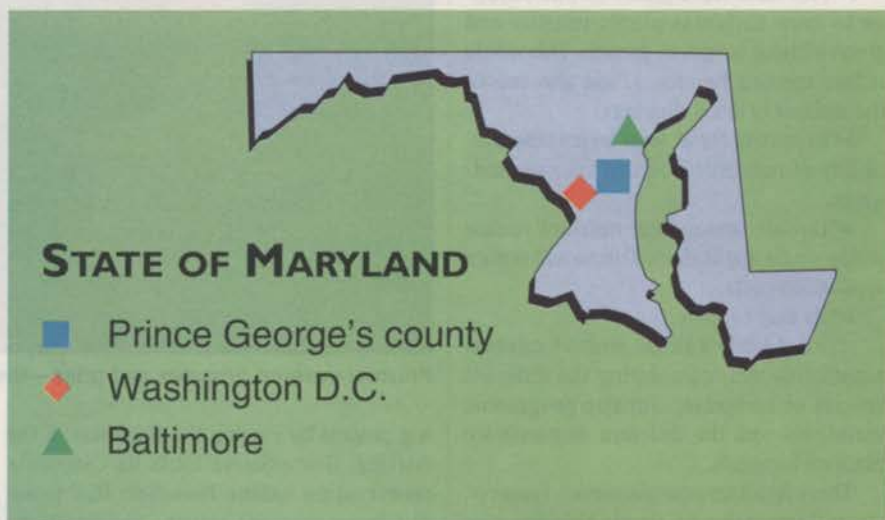
Too bad. It looks like it may not go away this time. Not unless the green industry, under the umbrella of the Maryland Alliance for Responsible Regulation of Pesticides, can change the minds of the nine-member county council. On July 1 the law went into effect. Almost immediately one large application company hired part-time workers to put warning signs in clients' lawns for the start of the season's third treatment round.

Meanwhile, the pro-industry alliance began soliciting support from lawn and landscape customers to oppose the law.

"We would need extra labor for either the phone calls and/or physically making a special trip to the property just to put the



Schlossberg: extra labor now needed



sign out. Then if the sign is not there and we treat anyway, the county will fine us and the customer," says Mark I. Schlossberg, Pro-Lawn-Plus, Reistertown, Maryland.

The county council originally passed the law in 1985, but it was unenforceable until U.S. District Judge J. Frederick Motz in Baltimore lifted the injunction late this spring. He took the action because of the June 1991 ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court that allowed local governments to enact their own pesticide-use laws.

Prince George's County, located just northeast of Washington, D.C., requires that warning signs be posted at least 24 hours in advance by anyone—professionals as well as homeowners—applying pesticides to a property.

Donald A. Nork, county director of environmental health, said citations will be issued only after the county receives a complaint and finds an infraction. The penalty is a \$50 fine. The county only has one employee to police all of Prince George's County.

Most lawn and landscape professionals here say the law is unnecessary. They say the law will substantially increase the cost of doing business for lawn and landscape businesses, an increase that ultimately must be passed on to clients.

Schlossberg, a director of the Maryland Turfgrass Council, said Maryland's 1986 Pesticide Notification Law already requires professional applicators to inform consumers of lawn/landscape pesticide use and to post for 48 hours after a pesticide application.

"Our industry strongly supports reasonable regulation," says Schlossberg. "The responsible companies in our industry will go out of their way to voluntarily pre-notify anyone who would like advance notification." That he claims can be accomplished with an expanded registry for pesticide-sensitive individuals.

"It (county pre-posting law) doesn't address the right-to-know issue," he says.

Schlossberg says industry is committed to getting the law repealed.

—Ron Hall

## Judge: Massachusetts state law is enough regulation for one town

■ Licensed lawn applicators in Mansfield, Mass., *don't* have to put pink warning placards every 50 feet around the properties they treat there.

A superior court judge said they're already covered by regulations of the Massachusetts Pesticide Control Act.

The city reportedly will not appeal the judge's decision, reports the Massachusetts Association of Lawn Care Professionals (MALCP), whose members donated \$3,300 to oppose the regulations. Even so, the four companies involved in the dispute with Mansfield—ChemLawn, The Lawn Co., TruGreen, and Tuckahoe Lawn Care—reportedly spent about \$20,000 defending their right to do business in Mansfield.

In a related matter, MALCP reports it raised \$11,000 through a silent auction to work for passage of pre-emption legislation in the state. Participating contributors: Agriturf, BASF, Ciba-Geigy, DowElanco, Earth Gro, Hoeschst-Roussel, Lebanon Chemical Co., Partner's Quality Lawn Service, ProLawn, Rhone Poulenc, Riverdale Chemical, Sandoz, O. M. Scotts, and Tuckahoe Turf Farm.

## Illinois trio: herbicide use harms civil rights

■ Three residents of Hinsdale, Ill., claim that the village violated their civil rights by applying a herbicide on public properties last fall.

The three complainants, one of whom filed the claim on behalf of her 14-year-old son, are to meet with village officials this summer. The three claim they are "chemically sensitive" and suffered headaches, asthma and nausea after the application of Confront, a herbicide, to parks and grounds at the village hall and library. (Molitor Grounds Maintenance, Glen Ellyn, Ill., performed the work under contract to the village.)

Hinsdale officials deny that they violated anybody's civil rights. They say there's no evidence linking the herbicide with the illnesses.

If the complainants and the village don't reach a conciliation by mid-summer, the matter could end up in the lap of the Illinois Civil Rights Commission, reports the *Chicago Sun*.

# Proper software puts reins back into the LCO's hands

by Bill Wheeler

■ Almost every aspect of your life is touched by computers. Your alarm clock, digital watch, coffee maker, and car—all depend upon some form of computer technology. It has been more than a dozen years since the microcomputer started a virtual information revolution.

Yet, in this day and age, it still astounds me that some businesses refuse the benefits of automation. With scarce resources and increasing competition, the decision to ignore computerization is simply a bad move.

**Computers save time**—It's too easy to say "I don't have time to learn." But computers can save you time, by making certain tasks like payroll, routing and estimating easier and quicker. This means more billable time and, thus, more opportunity for profit.

In the lawn care industry, the use of a computer system is an absolute must if customer service orders are to be processed at optimum efficiency and if inventory is to be controlled at minimum levels. The faster an order is processed, the faster the customer receives his services, and the faster your money comes back.

Can you track and anticipate your customers' needs? The ability to do this will not only help you service your customers better, but keeps your orders coming in. A well-designed system will allow you to check customers' credit and inform you of current stocking level status while updating inventory levels and billing.

**Just-in-time ordering**—"Just-in-time" ordering will allow you to stock just enough turf management materials to keep your customer orders moving without overstocking inventory.

You can track your customers' ordering history, so that you can adjust your reorder demands. The ability to cross-reference similar items may make the difference between servicing a customer and

losing a sale. And, since many customers are discount sensitive, choose a system that can automatically compute discounts based on volume, price, frequency, or other criteria that you need.

Once those orders start moving out, tracking your late receivables makes a difference in lost interest and revenue. Many systems allow you to calculate early payment discounts. A consolidated bill or statement, even for multiple locations, makes it easier for your customers.

Billing will be more efficient and you can keep track of what's owed and how long it's been owed. This way you can easily identify preferred and slow-paying customers. And most software programs will print statements and even address the envelopes for you.

**Information routing**—For this, the system must be fully integrated, so that information entered into the system will be distributed in the entire system without

the need to re-enter the same information a second time. Some of the areas that will need special attention are order entry, inventory control, billing, payroll, and accounts receivable. All of these will have to be integrated with each other, and the final information must be passed on to your general ledger.

For larger operations, the system should be designed to allow for multiple operators and workstations.

With such a system, all data should be routed properly, so information is easily retrieved from the computer.

With the powerful fully-integrated accounting products on the market today, this type of system is available, and there is no need to custom program for a specific business.

With a well-designed system, users should be able to change screen descriptions, and also design custom reports without the assistance of computer experts.

It is also important to note that the basic terms of payroll, billing, or general

In the lawn care industry, the use of a computer system is an absolute must if customer service orders are to be processed at optimum efficiency.



ledger should not be misleading in evaluating a system.

Careful plans and patience will go a long way to set up a good system that will generate what you need.

Some general use software packages are designed exclusively with the green industry in mind.

A budget package may seem like a deal

at first, but will it keep pace with your business' growth? Choosing an expensive package seems to be a difficult choice, but look for features that relate to your specific business. Compare all the features as they relate to your business before you commit to a certain package. You do not have to make a life-long decision at the initial point of purchase.

The system should offer flexibility, so that it can adapt to your business, and also grow with the business.

Remember: this computer system is only a tool or equipment in your business, just like other pieces of equipment. It has a limited life and will most likely have to be replaced in several years.

**Dealers stress service**—In the early 1980s, computer dealers opened their doors and basically took orders for sales with little or no effort.

Experts who deal in the type of systems needed in lawn care have learned to speak the language of lawn care, have learned to solve the problems of lawn care and, in short, think in terms of lawn care.

—At the time this article was written, Bill Wheeler was marketing director for Armor Systems, Inc., of Maitland, Fla.

## PLCAA committee: more franchise, mom/pop shops

■ The number of professional lawn care companies will continue to grow even though it's going to be harder to enter the market. That's what the Strategic Planning Committee of the Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA) thinks.

The committee predicts that:

- Lawn care franchises will increase in number.
- The number of personalized care and mom-and-pop operations will grow too.
- Companies will offer more add-on services to stabilize cash flow.
- Companies will offer more information to customers.
- The industry will face increasing regulation.
- LCOs will accept regulation, but not at the local level.
- Companies must find ways to keep good personnel.
- Natural (all organic) products will find a solid niche in the industry.
- Customers already expect service and quality. Increasingly they'll expect creativity.

The committee meets about once a year and is made up of application company owners/managers, supplier representatives, and members of the trade press. Although the its objective is to keep PLCAA pointed in the right direction, it also periodically rubs its crystal ball.

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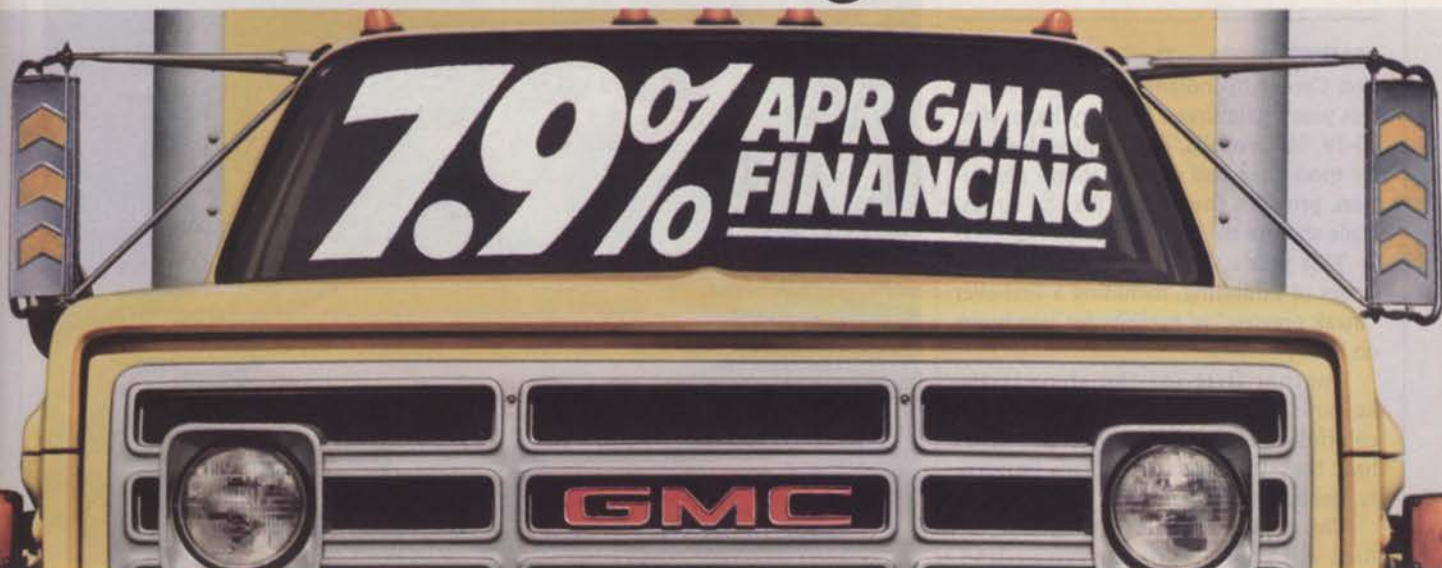
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THE STRENGTH OF EXPERIENCE

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# HOT TOPICS

## Green Industry Expo '92: most comprehensive ever

**Controversial keynoter,  
outdoor demonstrations,  
three separate educational  
programs...GIE has it all.**

**MARIETTA, Ga.**—The Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis is the site of this year's gala Green Industry Expo, Nov. 15-19. Indianapolis, a day's drive (or less) for more than half of the nation's population, provides the setting for the largest trade show in the lawn/landscape industry.

This year's show will offer five extra hours of exhibiting, including a first-ever "sneak preview" of exhibits for two hours on Nov. 16.

Another first for the show is the keynote address, being delivered by the colorful—and sometimes volatile—men's head basketball coach at Indiana University, Bobby Knight.

The popular Outdoor Demonstration Area will again feature the newest landscape maintenance equipment on display.

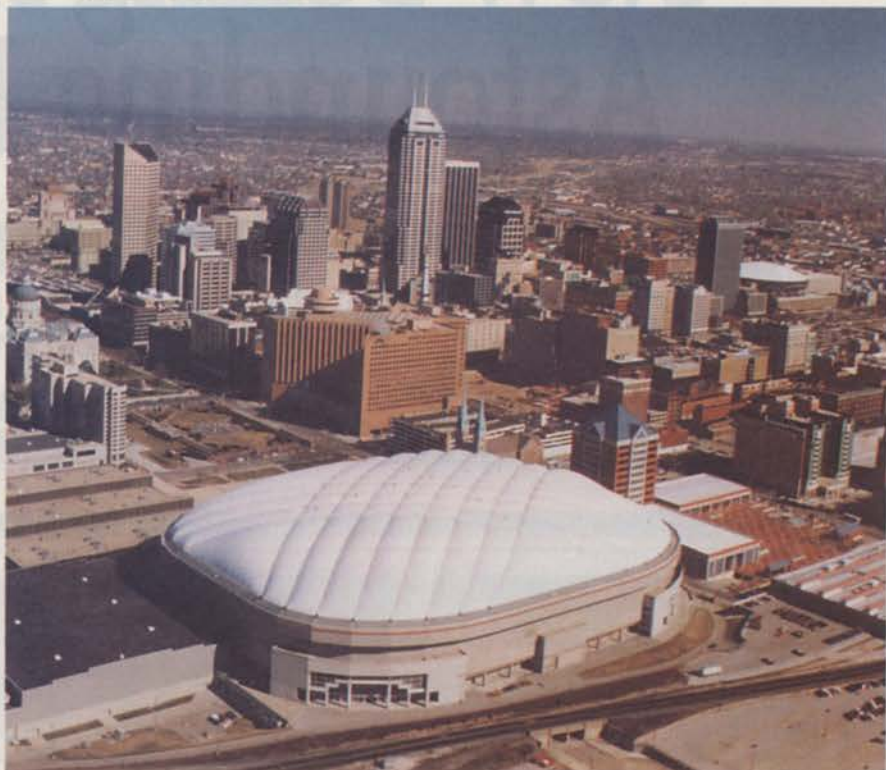
The show is sponsored by the Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA), Associated Landscape Contractors of America (ALCA) and Professional Grounds Management Society (PGMS). Each will have its own attendant slate of educational sessions.

The PLCAA's 13th annual conference, titled "Race with the Best," will contain several tracks: technology, business, risk communication, legislative and re-certification.

"This conference will offer something for everyone involved in lawn care," says Mike Shaw, conference education chair.

### ELSEWHERE

**Drought surprises  
Pacific Northwest,  
p. 42**



**The Indiana Convention Center (Hoosier Dome in foreground) is site of the largest trade show in the lawn and landscape industry.**

*(Photo courtesy Indiana Convention and Visitors Association)*

"The sessions cover the entire range of issues important to lawn care professionals.

PLCAA attendees who are information gluttons can participate in the "Head Start" roundtables, where LCOs will informally discuss business and technical challenges. A prospective member reception, which includes a contest for a free trip for two to the 1993 conference, is also slated.

Kevin Kehoe is featured speaker at ALCA's Landscape and Grounds Maintenance Conference. During two sessions, he will show attendees how to use Total Quality Management concepts to boost their bottom lines.

More than 15 total ALCA sessions and events are scheduled, focusing on developing new profit centers, maintaining profits

in a competitive market, making sales presentations, building team spirit, and more.

For the first time ever, the PGMS will hold its own separate educational sessions. Topics to be covered include: middle management training, color in commercial landscapes and doing more with less. Other events are an optional Winner's Circle breakfast, an awards banquet and reception, and optional pre-conference and spouse's tours.

For more information on the Green Industry Expo trade show, phone (404) 973-2019. For a free brochure on the PLCAA meeting, call (404) 977-5222. For info on ALCA's program, call (703) 620-6363. To register for PGMS's sessions, call (410) 667-1833.