

BY SUE GIBSON / EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Will your landing be soft?

“The landscape is changing fast,” said *The Wall Street Journal* recently, referring to the changing consensus on our economy’s health. Just last fall, leading economists, the Federal Reserve and even the IMF were predicting healthy growth for world markets.

Now they’re changing their tunes. With the Nasdaq sliding 39% in 2000 and giants like Xerox asking employees not to make copies “unless absolutely necessary,” you have to wonder how this new economy will affect your prospects for 2001. Add in a bitter cold winter and some unusually high prices for commodities like fuel and fertilizer, and you have a whole new ballgame.

Are you prepared? The economy’s changing landscape will affect your business and, although it’s early, you’re still better off if you’re prepared.

Hard eyes on the budget

It doesn’t seem logical that a sudden drop in the value of a strong sector like technology stocks should affect your business, but it will. The drop in value is affecting consumer confidence, which affects many things like:

- big-ticket spending (on houses, business investments, durable goods)
- construction and renovation spending,

credit (more of it, further compounding the problem)

- corporate budgets (getting tighter in anticipation of more slowing.)

When the business community also starts worrying, the ripple effect gets worse:

- they hire fewer people and cut operating and financing plans, further affecting other businesses
- they close unprofitable operations, putting more people out of work and more office space up for grabs
- they start looking at their budgets with hard eyes for more ways to save.

What does this mean for you? Your residential and commercial customers will be giving their landscape and lawn care budgets more scrutiny, and may pare down 2001 services. In-house grounds managers will be under similar internal pressure.

Clients will ask you to keep budgets in line, cut budgets or get more maintenance services for the same money. Look for fewer construction projects, too.

One harsh winter

You’re going to feel this winter’s chill soon (if you haven’t already) in:

- skyrocketing prices for heating fuel,
- higher fertilizer prices,
- probable higher prices for vehicle fuels,
- weather damage to landscapes, or
- loss of many landscape plants.

While the last two items may offer good opportunities for landscape restoration work, consider the effects of higher vehicle and heating fuel costs on your customers and on your own bottom line. As these costs eat into your customers’ profits and household budgets, will your customers earmark their leftovers for landscape work — a service that traditionally doesn’t have a high priority?

I hope they do. I hope you make an extra effort to reach out to clients and remind them of the benefits they get for their landscape money.

Contact Sue at 440/891-2729 or e-mail at sgibson@advanstar.com



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Turf's brave new world

Turfgrasses resistant to the herbicide Roundup (a.i. glyphosate) should be in the marketplace within the next five years, says Dr. Virgil Meier of The Scotts Company.

In fact, seeds for glyphosate-resistant bentgrass may be available by the fall of 2003. The most optimistic forecast is for transgenic Kentucky bluegrass to be available in 2004, and genetically modified St. Augustinegrass not too many years later, said Meier at The Ohio Turfgrass Conference this past December.

All the pieces seem to be in place for these first transgenic turfgrasses to become reality. Researchers/cooperators have been assessing them for several years, and Scotts awaits approval from government agencies such as USDA's Animal Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) so that it can begin its commercial production. (Scotts, so far, is the only company to have stated that it has specific plans for genetically modified turfgrasses.)

These plants will contain the same gene that imparts glyphosate resistance to crops like corn and soybeans. The Monsanto Company, which also manufactures and markets Roundup, one of the most widely used herbicides in the world, owns that gene.

Meanwhile, researchers search for genes that can be inserted into turfgrass plants to make them resistant to insects, diseases or drought. Development of turfs with these

genes, however, is at least a decade away — probably more — and turfgrass breeders, relying on the traditional selection process, will almost certainly make great strides in these directions, too.

Even so, prepare for the coming of glyphosate-resistant turfgrasses. They offer exciting benefits for turfgrass professionals, but also huge management challenges for landscape and lawn care managers. First, let's take a look at their potential benefits.

What good are they?

Because the first releases of genetically altered turfgrass will not be harmed by glyphosate, you can apply the herbicide to turf to control grassy and broadleaf weeds on the property. It's likely you won't need to put down a pre-emergent. You wait for weeds to appear before you make an application, and you treat only where weeds are present.

Over time, weeds may become resistant to Roundup, admitted Meier. If or when that happens, though, other herbicides can be used to control them.

Of more immediate concern is the management challenge that Roundup-resistant turf will pose to turf managers. Consider the case of a lawn care professional who has customers with both glyphosate-resistant properties and others with lawns of "traditional" turfgrass.

Imagine the damage resulting to customers' properties should a spray technician misread the route sheet and treat the wrong properties with glyphosate.

Imagine the complexity of treating properties of both glyphosate and insect-resistant turfs. Or disease and insect-resistant turfgrasses? Or any other combination of improved transgenic turfs that may be developed. The task of properly treating each individual property could become a nightmare.

"It's going to take a lot more recordkeeping and a lot better communications with your customers," said Meiers of the arrival of transgenic turf.

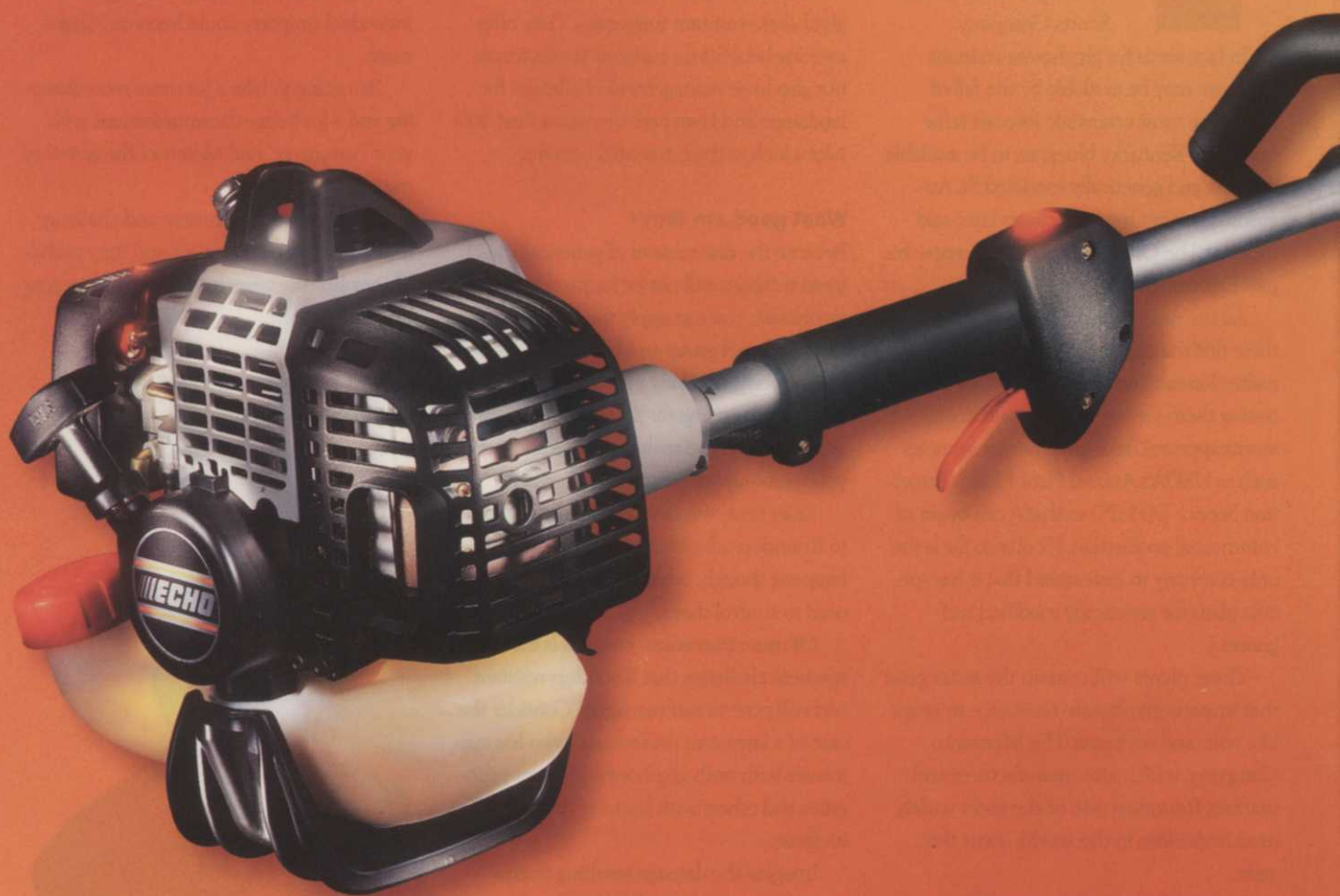
Transgenic turf's promise and challenge may seem to be years away, and they probably are. But the years have a way of creeping up on all of us.

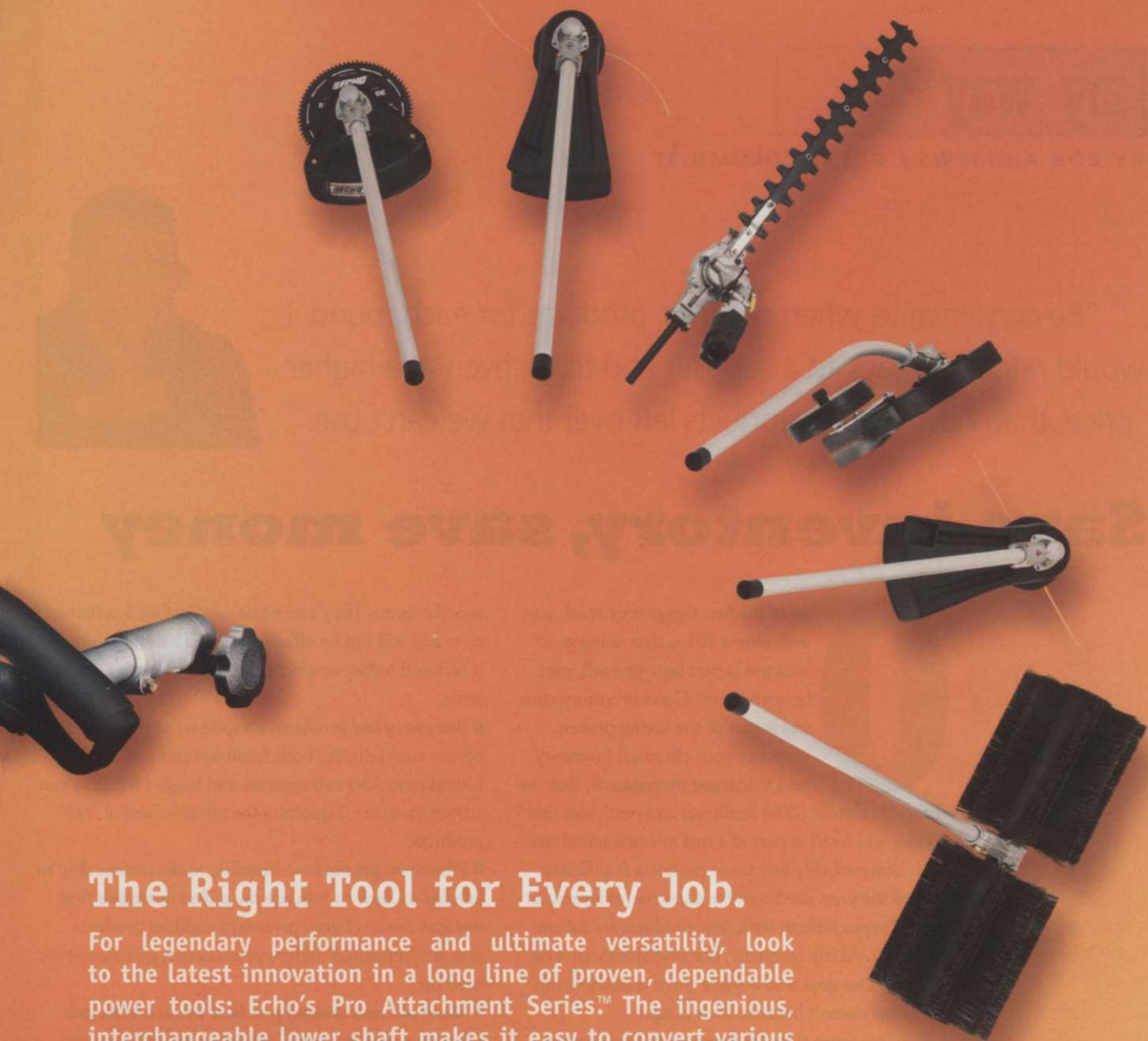
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Genetically modified turfgrasses will contain the same gene that imparts glyphosate resistance to crops like corn and soybeans.

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Save inventory, save money

One of the first things they teach you in Business 101 is that doing good business is part how you sell, part how you save. Good inventory control is part of the saving process. Consider your chemical inventory. As a landscape professional, that "inventory" is almost 100% fertilizers and pesticides that you buy and resell as part of a turf or ornamental treatment. You probably buy these products at different times of the year, use them for a specific treatment or pest and replace them with new products for future treatments. At my company, our inventories are ever changing. Our goal is to deplete them quickly so our warehouse doesn't become their home!

Here are some rules for smart inventory management:

- **Keep good records of your past use.** Landscape care is a series of rounds. Do you know what you used in Round 2 last year, and the year before that? Is the information broken down by "product used" and "square feet covered?" Reviewing this history should be your first step in ordering this year because it shows not only what you treated in the past, but also how it increased or decreased from year to year.
- **Be conservative when ordering products for each round.** Consider growth over previous years, as well as anticipated growth for this year — then back off a bit. I would much rather have to go back to a supplier and fill in, even at a higher price, than have excess product left over.
- **Timing is everything.** Today, many pesticides and fertilizers are meant to be used for specific purposes at

specific times. They cannot be used before a certain time and will not be effective after. Therefore, having it on hand before or after that critical period makes no sense.

■ **Beware of old products.** Despite what some salesperson may tell you, both fertilizers and pesticides age. Liquid pesticides can separate and bagged fertilizer can attract moisture. I question the effectiveness of "old" products.

■ **When you get the new supplies, make certain they're labeled as such so you use the oldest materials first, not last.** Some of your inventory includes products that are "restocked" before your current inventories are used up.

■ **Mark old and unused products so no one forgets what they are!** Beware: Containers get dirty and factory-supplied labels can fall off.

■ **Be flexible enough to use up leftover products.** Try to be inventive and use them without violating your guaranteed analysis or the label's directions.

■ **Remember that your actual cost-of-goods sold is impacted by unused products.** If you don't sell it, the cost negatively affects your bottom line.

■ **It's prudent to let inventories dwindle to virtually nothing as you go into your downtime.** Most of our businesses are seasonal, so many of us have an annual downtime.

Control your inventory carefully and consistently and you'll find yourself making more money — by saving it.

— The author is president of *The Greenskeeper*, Carmel, IN, and past president of PLCAA. He can be reached at 317/846-7131.

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NEWS YOU CAN USE

Greenzebras.com eyes merger

MAYNARD, MA - Greenzebras.com, an e-commerce company that debuted at the Green Industry Expo last November, is seeking to merge with another Green Industry dot-com company. The reason for the merger is largely financial, since one of the company's investors, eColony, dropped its commitment to fund them.

Ward named CEO of ServiceMaster

DOWNERS GROVE, IL — Jonathon P. Ward takes over as president and CEO of ServiceMaster (NYSE: SVM) on Feb. 12. Ward, 46, comes to ServiceMaster from R.R. Donnelley & Sons Co., where he was president and CEO. He succeeds C. William Pollard, 62, who served as ServiceMaster CEO from 1983-1993. Pollard will continue to serve as chairman of the board. Servicemaster is the parent company of TruGreen-ChemLawn and TruGreen Land-care.

TopPro has new product line

MEMPHIS, TN — TopPro Specialties, a unit of BASF Corp. and Micro Flo Co., has a new product line of herbicides, insecticides and fungicides for the turf and ornamental industry. The product expansion, which includes Amdro Pro, is a result of BASF's acquisition of American Cyanamid.

Lawn pros unite to contain NY law

ALBANY, NY — Beginning March 1, landscape/lawn contractors in Nassau, Suffolk and Westchester counties in New York State must comply with a new "Pesticide Neighbor Notification Law." As *LM* went to press, other counties were studying the law, but only Albany County appeared to be close to adopting it.

State lawmakers approved and Gov. George Pataki signed the measure last summer. Green Industry observers described it as an election year compromise, a concession to intense lobbying by a coalition of consumer advocacy groups bent on dramatically reducing pesticide use in the state. They specifically targeted chemical use in residential settings and public areas.

While the new law mandates pre-notification for schools and day care centers, it's the requirement of 48-hour advance pre-notification that rankles the application community and, particularly, professional lawn care companies. Application companies that deliver service in counties that have approved the law must provide written notice to abutting properties located within 150 feet of any lawn pesticide application. The notice will include the location and date (including two rain dates) of application, the pesticide to be used, the company making the application and how to get more information.

This particular provision of the law is not statewide, unlike the pre-notification of schools and day care centers. The state legislature left it up to each county to adopt the 48-hour neighbor pre-notification portion of the law.

A costly law?

Members of the New York State Lawn Care Association (NYSLCA) are attempt-

GREEN ISSUES



ing to keep that measure from spreading. They've been meeting with their respective county lawmakers, explaining why the law is unnecessary and how it will raise customers' prices and the cost of doing business. They've also been pointing out that the majority of lawn care customers don't want it.

"That old statement about all politics being local has never been so true," says Robert E. Ottley, One-Step Tree & Lawn-care, N. Chili, NY. "This pre-notification law has become a local issue and the local legislators have to look at its implications."

While the lawn care industry in the state is small compared to other industries, it can count on strong public support if it gets its message out, says Kevin Petrinec, Funk Lawn Care, Tonawanda, NY. Petrinec has participated in radio call-in

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