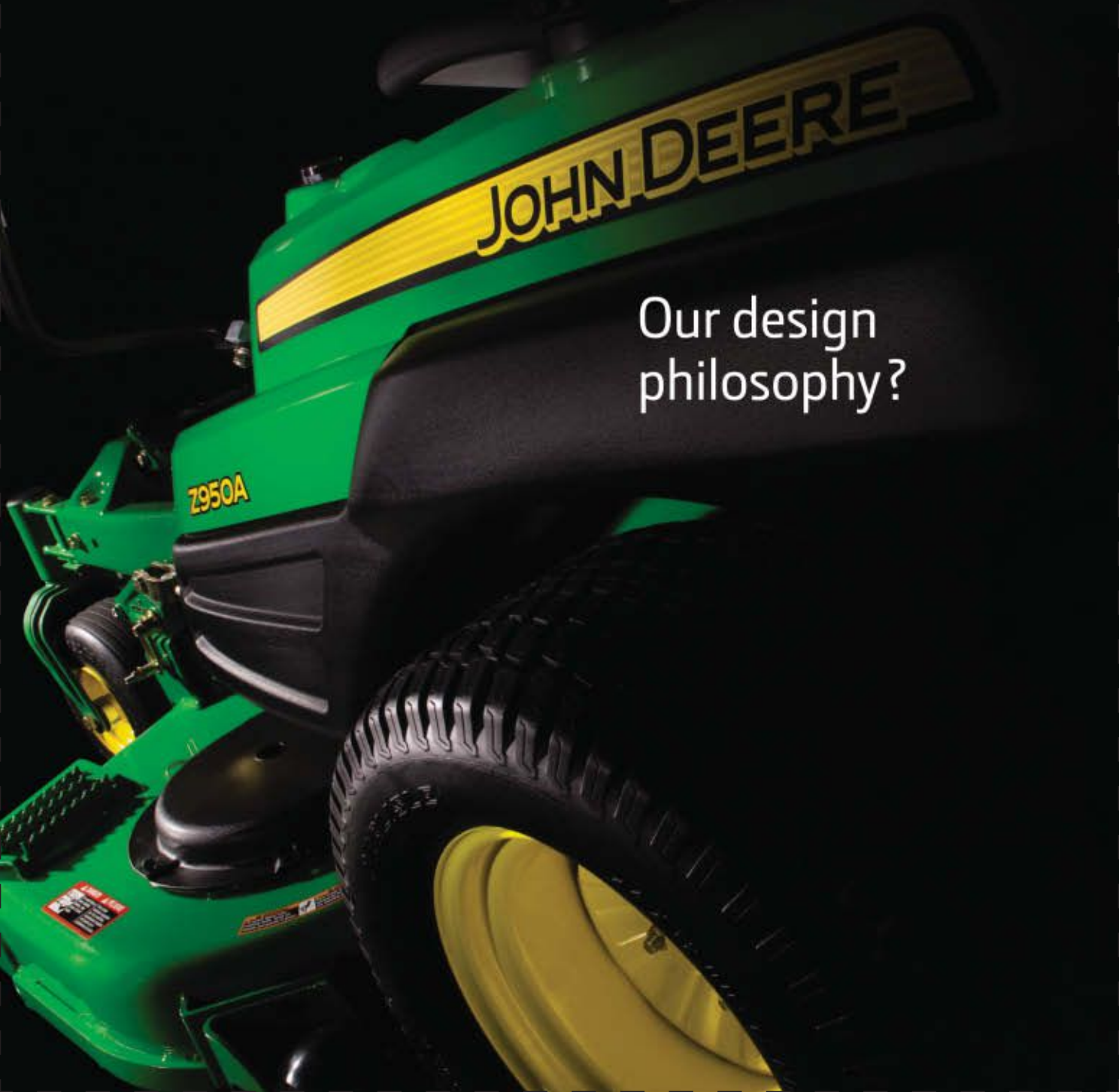


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Athletic Turf News

Pesticides are a piece of sports field management. Other vital practices of green management include proper fertilizer, water and equipment use.

LD/B Solutions

Landscape professionals like to describe their services as "high-end" design/build, but everyone can't be high-end.

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Synthetic turf: Threat or opportunity?

From the state that gave us skateboards, the Beach Boys and many of the trends we associate with modern landscaping comes an outdoor living innovation that is figuring larger in our industry: Synthetic turf.

No, artificial turf wasn't invented in California and it's not manufactured there, but it has become one of the hottest landscape products in the Golden State as evidenced by the large number of fake grass suppliers at February's California Landscape Association Landscape Industry Show. The state's 37 million residents (about 12% of our nation's population), make it the largest landscape market in the U.S.

In California and elsewhere a decade ago, synthetic turf was being promoted as a niche landscape product, primarily for backyard putting greens, dog runs or areas within a landscape where it's difficult to maintain turfgrass. These remain popular uses for the product that's available in a surprising array of styles.

But the synthetic turf industry is now eyeing the millions of acres of lawns on residential and commercial properties, and and it's promoting its engineered, branded, poly products as an environmentally friendly alternative to turfgrass lawns. To that end, it's aggressively touting the "environmental" benefits of its products that require no watering, fertilization, pesticide use or mowing.

Synthetic turf is being promoted as an environmentally friendly alternative to real turfgrass lawns.

The industry also claims that synthetic turf reduces air pollution, decreases dust, and slows or prevents erosion — claims that most people in professional lawn services would say are exaggerated, if not suspect, at least compared to the research-backed environmental benefits of maintained, living turfgrass.

From sports to home lawns

The point here isn't to debate the relative environmental or lifestyle benefits of turfgrass versus synthetic turf, but to identify a bonifide and growing landscape trend, especially if the acceptance of synthetic turf in home lawns follows what's happening in sports turf.

Synthetic turf erupted into the sports field market beginning in the mid-1960s, as professional and university teams across the country embraced it. Its popularity waned in the 1980s when turfgrass researchers, borrowing from golf, introduced to sports field builder innovations such as sand-based drainage systems and improved turfgrass cultivars.

Given up for dead by the late 1980s, one company in particular, FieldTurf, revived the industry with highly engineered synthetic turf product that looked more like turfgrass and provided superior playing characteristics than earlier versions of the product.

During the past decade the number of installations of synthetic turf sports fields installations, including conversions from turfgrass, have soared.

Yes, California's aggressive efforts to convince property owners to conserve water is boosting synthetic turf installations there. But there's more going on than that, including the fake grass industry's message that *fake grass remains green and requires less maintenance than real grass*.

Will that message resonate with property owners elsewhere in the U.S. where water isn't such a big issue? My guess is, yes.

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BY **NICOLE
WISNIEWSKI**
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

THE INNOVAT LAB

Industry visionaries discuss their latest lawn care solutions and how they are working overtime to empower landscape professionals to do more with less.

DURING TOUGH economic times, it's not unusual for companies to make cuts. But how company executives should do this isn't always spelled out. Should managers strip out service bells and whistles? Shave time on job sites? Lower sales force incentives? Reduce head count?

And what about product purchasing? When it comes to eliminating weeds, insects and diseases for client accounts, as well as feeding turf and ornamentals with nutrients or using growth regulators, a lawn care operator (LCO) can't just cut corners. Switching products to save money without doing enough research could lead to poor aesthetics and customer callbacks, which

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For product profiles, see page 19.

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increases labor costs — a lawn care business' largest expense.

LCOs have to do their homework and understand current trends when selecting the right products. As regulation and legislative challenges mount, in addition to the increasing cost to bring new products to market, manufacturers focus on innovation that meets the growing sustainability trend and LCOs' need for speed — and results.

It's called doing more with less, or more with the same. And driving efficiency can boost the health of clients' landscapes *and* the bottom line.

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THE BEST THING ANY OF US CAN DO IN THIS INDUSTRY IS BE VOCAL. MAKE SURE YOUR LOCAL LEGISLATORS KNOW WHO YOU ARE."

— JASON KUHLEMEIER,
BAYER ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE



SPEAK OUT

Legislation and regulation regarding pesticide product development and use will likely always be a threat to the Green Industry.

"The time for increased regulation is quickly approaching, which is why the turf industry is working hard to educate the public and get credit for our environmental stewardship efforts," explains Carrie Doza, marketing communications manager, Agrotain International, St. Louis. "Unfortunately, the trend is that well-intentioned, voluntary initiatives are turning into strict regulations. In Florida, for example, regulations are being written on a grassroots level — sometimes without the guidance of research or end-user expertise."

To prevent these restrictions from materializing, "it's up to us to defend ourselves and our business practices," says Bob York, senior marketing manager for BASF Professional Turf & Ornamentals, Research Triangle Park, NC.

"We need a unified voice to maximize our chance for success," agrees Jeff Novak, marketing manager at Agrium Advanced Technologies, Loveland, CO.

LCOs should start by touting turf's cosmetic and environmental positives. "We must make an uneducated public understand the true risks versus the reward of healthy turf that stops erosion, runoff and loss of topsoil, and provides oxygen just like trees do," suggests Russ Mitchell, product and marketing director, Quali-Pro/MANA, Raleigh, NC.

Jose Milan, head of strategy, Syn-genta Lawn & Garden, Greensboro, NC, sees the silver lining in the situation.

"I would say our industry has more opportunities than threats," he says. "We provide so much value from every perspective. For example, environmentally, plants are natural air filters; economically, they add to the value of our homes; and socially, green spaces increase our social well-being."

Doza recommends LCOs become involved at the local level.

"As you read your community newspaper, or get the latest local gossip when you stop for your morning cup of coffee, be aware of these types of grassroots groups, then do your best to educate the active participants," she advises. "As a lawn care professional, you are a proven steward of the land and have expansive knowledge regarding what is best for turf. These are the times to use your influence by participating in voluntary initiatives to ensure

future regulations include best management practices that you can utilize."

Ultimately, it's about being vocal — or as Jason Kuhlemeier, manager, insecticides, Research Triangle Park, NC's Bayer Environmental Science, calls it, "being seen and heard." He suggests LCOs try sending short, well-written notes to local legislators: "Make sure they know about you and your business."

Doug Houseworth, manager of technical support, Arysta LifeScience Turf & Ornamentals, Cary, NC, concurs. "You have to be willing to state your case," he says. "If you're not, then you're toast in this industry."

"And if you need access to university research or other industry facts, contact your local distributor for tools to help you further your cause and save your livelihood," Doza adds.

Finally, proper product use is crucial.

"The best thing LCOs can do to protect their access to these tools is to continue to steward them carefully by reading and following label directions," says Brian Rund, director, branding and marketing services, Nufarm Americas, Burr Ridge, IL. "Take advantage of the resources available. The face of the industry is the person in the field, so it's key we do as much as we can to make those points of contact as professional and responsible as possible." — *NW*



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Efficient business = good business

Today, LCOs deal with rising fuel, material and labor costs — all of which dip into profits.

“Plus, the recession means their customers are eliminating services to accommodate their own shrinking budgets,” says Jeff Novak, marketing manager at Agrium Advanced Technologies, Loveland, CO. “But by using products that require fewer applications and deliver nutrients and pesticides gradually and consistently over a longer period of time, landscapers can realize cost and time savings.”

As a result, pesticide and fertilizer manufacturers are working “to strike a balance between minimal chemical impact on the environment with maximum effect on the

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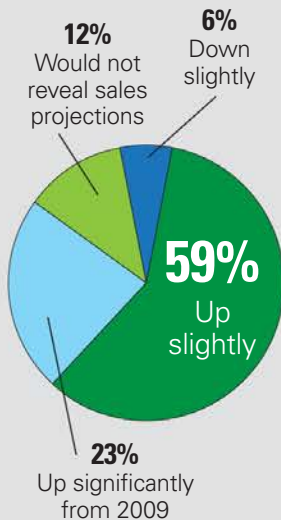
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— KERRY OVERTON, MONSANTO

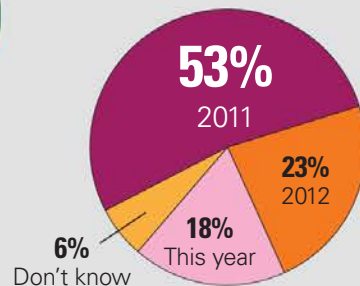


POSITIVE THINKING

What’s your crystal ball read for your 2010 sales?



In your opinion, when will the economy rebound?



Eighty-two percent of pesticide and fertilizer manufacturers report good news in the form of increasing sales this year: In fact, 23% say numbers will be up significantly over 2009. These positive P&L predictions are probably why more than half of manufacturers say the economic rebound will happen next year, while another 18% feel confident saying it will bounce back this year. — *NW*

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