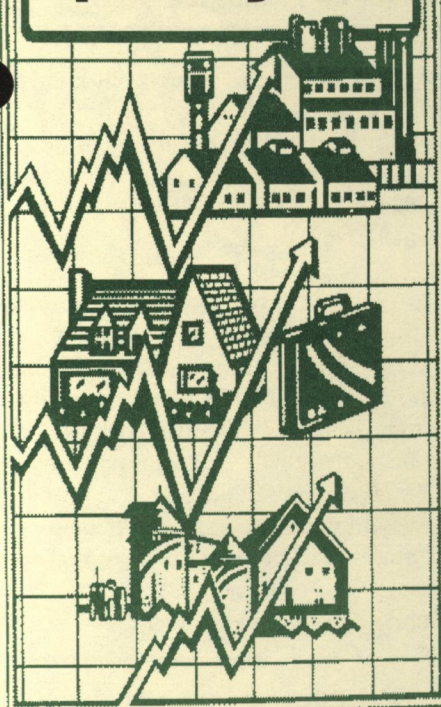


Apr / May 1999



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BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Turfgrass Producers International

'97 Ag Census Reports

Turf Production Is A 'Growing Concern' in U.S.

With sales increasing nearly 70% between 1992 and 1997, to a level of \$800,694,000, on 302,930 acres of production from 1,784 farms, turfgrass sod production is indeed a growing business. Figures now available from the 1997 Census of Agriculture may also represent a growing concern for those within the industry, particularly in light of record-low prices for most other forms of agriculture.

Conducted approximately every five years, the U.S. Ag Census for 1997 reports Florida had the most farms (166), the greatest acreage (65,185) and the highest sales (\$127,803,000). Texas came

in second for farms at 156, and acres at 27,627, while Alabama was in third place with 92 farms and 17,194 acres. California took second place in sales with \$124,487,000, while Georgia edged out Texas for third place in sales with \$52,118,000, compared to \$51,600,000.

On a national average, the per acre value of turfgrass sod in 1997 was \$2,643, compared to \$2,162 in 1992. However, when acreage values are examined by size of farm, the 217 farms with \$1 million or more in sales in 1997 generated approximately \$3,334 per acre, while the 83 farms with annual sales not exceeding \$2,499 generated only \$165 per acre.

While the report shows 14 states having fewer sod farms in '97 than in '92, only 5 states had less acreage and only 3 had reduced total sales.

State-by-state and national figures can be accessed on the U.S. Department of Agriculture's website at <http://www.nass.usda.gov/census/census97/volume1/vol1pubs.htm>. Due to large file sizes, it may take an extended time to download some of the census reports.

Recognizing that these reports will be widely circulated, producers must recognize that sod can suffer from a commodity-pricing mentality that encourages greater acreage in production that ultimately forces prices down. Also, individual turfgrass farm marketing, service and product quality are essential to success. Lastly, while the barriers to entering the turf industry are not insurmountable, substantial capital is required, as well as long-term land commitments, if the operation is to be successful and profitable.

July 20-23

Summer Convention At MSU Presents Change

Consider these changes that will be part of TPI's Summer Convention & Field Days:

- * A 14-topic, day-long symposium, featuring the best and brightest turfgrass scientists

- * In-door equipment parade to introduce the latest improvements and new items

- * Extended equipment demonstrations, allowing more time for all items to operate

- * Cash-and-carry refreshment and food service available continuously (no waiting in line for a fixed lunch)

- * Low event ticket prices!

Now, consider what plans you need to make to attend this year's summer greatest show on turf. Call TPI 800/405/8873, fax 847/705-8347 or e-mail to Turf-Grass@msn.com for details and registration or exhibit materials.

Be Aware Of Credit Card Fraud In Tampa

Several members attending the TPI Conference in Tampa had their credit card numbers used by unknown people. Check your statement to ensure that only proper charges are on your account.

Marketing Tip

John McPhail, Gold Star Sod Farms
Canterbury, New Hampshire

Be a host. How many times have you offered a potential client to come and tour your farm? The fact is that most sod customers have never visited a sod farm yet most would jump at the chance to see the facility, and talk to the grower first hand. You can use this curiosity factor to build better partnerships with your customer base while finding new business. Just by opening your doors and playing host to a few select special events, meetings or educational sessions.

Host a meeting. Local and regional organizations usually meet regularly, and constantly search for meeting sites. Offer your farm as a site and host the meeting, which of course will enable you to "show off" your entire operation to a captive targeted market group. Be sure to tour the attendees. Unlike a typical trade show, they will be focused on only one booth - your great operation.

Target your audience. Make sure to target your market before you open the gates. It is important to define your target customer, lest you waste time and money on people you may not even want

to do business with. Then it is just as important to know what the target customer is looking for. Tours can be a great way of asking your target customers what they are looking for, as well as building the kind of relationship that makes them loyal.

Host your own event. Another way of bringing a select group to your facility is to hold an educational event or "field day" at your farm. First, contact one or more organizations and determine what kind of education would benefit their members. Then, tailor a program for that group. Example: For a Grounds Managers' Association you might offer 'Mowing Techniques & General Turf Maintenance Field Day.'

Another example: For a Sports Turf Managers Association, you could offer a demonstration day at your farm entitled 'Tips on Goal Mouth Repair and Renovation - The Easy Way'. The possibilities are limitless and most organizations are desperate for new ideas on how to provide cost effective outings to their membership.

Bring in an Expert. Hire a well-known turf expert to lecture at your facility and invite a select group to hear him or her speak. Before and after the group listens to the speaker, you get to show off your product(s) and services.

Turfgrass sod farms have many attributes that make their facilities favorable to holding events - rolling expanses of grass, picturesque farmland, and a spacious quiet setting. Tours with live demonstrations can be an extremely effective way to reach potential clients. Education days also show willingness on your part to help customers reach a higher level of performance. Your contribution to their success can bring you future business.

Plugging 'Time Holes' for Increased Productivity

How many hours a week do you waste sitting at your desk, waiting "on hold," sitting in your truck/car or waiting for returned phone calls? These "time holes" can kill your productivity. Use these tactics to plug them up:

Create a "waiting time" folder (maybe one for your desk and one for your vehicle.) All work that can be done 'on the fly' should go in this folder - forms to fill out, articles to read, TPI newsletters to digest, etc. Crack open the folder when you find that you've got a few minutes to kill.

Motivational cassette tapes or audio versions of the latest business best-sellers can be used either in the office or in your vehicle to productively fill down-time. Checking the office for messages and returning phone calls from your vehicle may also be an option. Promptly returning phone calls also sends a positive message about your focus on customer service.

By using your time efficiently, you are able to plug those pesky "time holes" and create more free time for yourself in the process!

Time Management Strategies for your Busy Spring Season

Personal productivity consultant David Allen (www.davidco.com) works with professionals and develops software tools to help people better manage their time. Here are some of Allen's tips:

*** Make more than one list.** Instead of a single, uncategorized To Do List, Allen keeps five lists. "Projects" includes all major, multi-part tasks, while "Next Actions" itemizes the individual steps on these projects. A "Waiting For" list tracks the tasks that require others' help or input, while "Calendar" contains time-specific tasks. Finally, a "Someday/Maybe" list documents tasks that he wants to do at some point down-the-road.

While all this list-keeping sounds complicated, you only have to think about each item once. Allen says it's important "to get (those items) off your

mind." If you're trying to remember or think about things you haven't done, or decide which one is more important, you're wasting your energy.

*** Purge your in-box every day.** Take items out one at a time, and don't move to the next until you've determined an action for each item. Don't put things back in your in-box -- create a file system (that corresponds to your lists) to track your action items.

*** Follow the two-minute rule.** Anytime you encounter an action item that will take less than two minutes to complete, do it. Don't always try to do the most important stuff first.

*** Always perform a weekly review.** Set aside time on a Friday or Monday to update lists and think about the week ahead.

Taking Care of Business: Use Your Government, You're Paying For It

Robert Stephens,
Stephens Turf Farms
Little Rock, Arkansas

Most of our experiences with the government involve complying with laws and bureaucratic regulations. Because of this, attitudes toward government employees and agencies run from toleration to loathing. This may not change. However, if your company needs help, there is no better place to look than your friendly, large government bureaucracy.

Government agencies offer free information, business advice, maps, marketing data and computer software. To access and use this wealth of data, try-out the government's web sites. Warning, these sites may provide too much information. Narrow your focus before downloading or printing a document. Here are a few of the sites available:

U.S. Business Advisor - www.business.gov/

A service of the Federal Government for businesses. The Advisor provides business with "one-stop access to federal government information, services and transactions."

Small Business Administration - www.sba.gov/

The Small Business Administration (SBA) provides information for starting, financing, and expanding a small business. In addition, the SBA includes details about SBA programs and a shareware library of programs to run a business.

Department of Commerce - www.doc.gov/

News reports, press releases, and conference announcements; speeches, publications and additional information. Links to Department Agencies and Information Services.

Department of Justice - www.usdoj.gov/

Links to Department organizations and recent Justice Department issues and news. Of note are the Justice Department Gophers, which include archives of press releases as well as detailed information about Department actions, including antitrust.

Census Bureau - www.census.gov/

Latest economic indicators with tables, press releases and tip sheets. Browse by subject and customize data to your needs with on-the-fly mapping and census info. software.

Environmental Protection Agency - www.epa.gov/

EPA news and events; information on rules, product regulations and legislation; publications; and environmental test methods and guidelines.

U.S. House of Representatives - www.house.gov/

U.S. Senate - www.senate.gov/

Legislative information, member info, Committees, and organizations of the House and Senate. Also provides a reference for current bills and resolutions before Congress.

Department of Agriculture - www.usda.gov/

This web site has USDA news releases and a listing of special events. Included are weather services, disaster assistance, and research services. Also, an interesting program called the Rural Business-Cooperative Services.

U.S. Geological Survey - www.usgs.gov/

News releases from the USGS, free publications, maps and data products. If you love maps this is the web site for you: mapping publications, water data, Landsat scenes and educational materials. A plethora of geological and mapping data.

Consumer Product Safety Commission - www.cpsc.gov/

Helpful consumer and business information, including press releases and publications. Alternatively, browse CPSC "success stories."

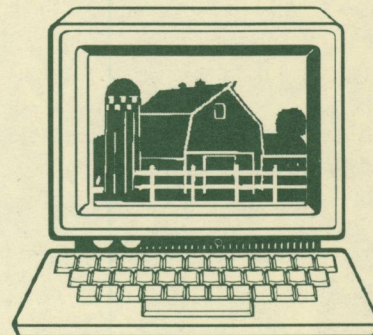
Shrewder Computing

"Please remain on the line...your call is very important to us..."

You've spent big bucks on your computer and software...and now there's a problem. Getting help from system/software technical support staff will be easier if you do some homework before you call:

Have the following things ready before you even pick up the phone:

- 1) the complete brand name of your equipment; 2) serial and model numbers; 3) invoice numbers, purchase order numbers and/or warranty numbers.



Also, have this information handy before you call for tech support:

- 1) a written description of the problem - including error messages you have seen
- 2) a step-by-step account of the steps you have taken to fix the problem

You'll save time and aggravation by having gathered this information before your call. If you're placed "on-hold," be prepared by having other work to address (see "Plugging Time Holes..." story, opposite page).

Once you've made contact, be concise and stick to the problem at hand. If you are clear and to-the-point, you will alleviate confusion and speed-up the solution process.

TPI Action

TPI Board of Trustees Calls on Washington, D.C. April 15 to express the organization's concerns and positions on chemical availability for turfgrass sod farms and legal labor shortages. In addition to addressing the EPA's implementation of the Food Quality & Protection Act (FQPA) and necessary revisions to the seasonal agricultural guest worker program (H-2A), the group will also meet with elected and appointed officials to discuss turf farming as agriculture and to gain a greater understanding of the directions now being considered for crop insurance. TPI's 11-person board will conduct its spring meeting the following day.

All U.S. TPI members are asked to call or write their Senators and Congressmen to voice concerns about these issues. Details are presented in the March/April issue of "Turf News" magazine.

A New 'Turf Resource Directory' is now being developed for distribution to all TPI members in early December. Approved by the Board as a new service and benefit to the members, the magazine-size publication will include a comprehensive buyers-guide, pesticide availability listing, multi-year index to "Turf News," magazine and the "Business Management" newsletter, as well as listings of significant websites, organizations, and important meetings. Because of the many uses it will have for members throughout the entire year, advertisers are expected to strongly support the new publication; however, members should encourage their favorite suppliers to become involved in this new special publication.

Update your contact information record regularly. Because TPI website listing of all members can be a reliable resource, everyone is asked to send up-to-date address, phone (new area codes especially), e-mail and website information to TPI.

1,009 Firms Now Belong To TPI...setting a new record. 1999-2000 renewal notices will be mailed in early May. Prompt payment ensures no lost benefits.

To Receive Additional Information On Any of These Items

Contact the TPI Office

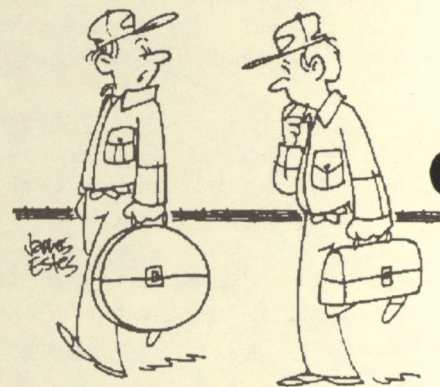
Phone: 800/405-8873 or 847/705-9898

Fax: 847/705-8347 or E-mail to Turf-Grass@MSN.COM

Jest For The Fun Of It

Did you know it was illegal to:

- * Secure a giraffe to a telephone pole in Atlanta, Georgia.
- * Try on more than six dresses in any one store in Joliet, Illinois.
- * Whistle under water in Vermont.
- * Break more than three dishes a day in Florida.
- * Dress a mannequin in Atlanta without shutting the window shades.
- * Enter a theater in Gary, Indiana within four hours of eating garlic.



"Pizza."

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

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