



# BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

AMERICAN SOD PRODUCERS ASSOCIATION

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## SOD PRODUCTION FERTILITY SEMINAR SET FOR FEB. 14

Increasing profitable production and maintaining environmental quality will be key segments of ASPA's one-day seminar on February 14 at the Lake Buena Vista, Florida, Hilton Hotel. The seminar's faculty will include Dr. James Beard, Texas A&M; Dr. Anthony Koski, Colorado State University; Drs. J.B. Sartain and Robert Dunn, University of Florida; Drs. Robert Issac and Bill Segars, University of Georgia, as well as Dr. Ray Hoyum of IMC Fertilizer, Inc., and Dr. Nobel Usherwood of the Potash & Phosphate Institute.

The specialized seminar will offer seven presentations on such areas as turf nutrition and physiology, as well as fertility relationships to pest management and the environment.

Registration will be limited to the first 100 ASPA member firm representatives who return completed forms, accompanied by the \$75 fee for the first person from the firm and \$50 for each additional representative from that firm. Fees include study materials, lunch and two breaks.

Complete seminar information and registration forms will be mailed to all ASPA members in the near future, along with details about the 1990 ASPA Midwinter Conference that will be held February 14-16 in the same location.

Because of the importance of the program and outstanding faculty developed for the seminar, it is expected to "sell out" quickly, therefore, anyone interested in attending should act promptly.

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### FIELD'S COOKIE COMPANY IDEAS CAN MAKE OTHERS SMART COOKIES

In 13 years, Debbi Fields went from loving to bake cookies to owning a company with 650 stores and sales of \$170 million. Her ideas for success can be transferred to many other endeavors, including turfgrass sod. Here are a few ideas to start you thinking:

1. Urge managers to give away samples...it entices customers to buy their favorites and to try new varieties. (It works with cookies and could be effective with sod types.)
2. Give a job applicant a cookie (piece of sod) right in the middle of an interview. You can tell right away if they relate to what you're doing.
3. Provide intensive and extensive training, have managers work behind the counter (sod harvester) to get the real feel of the business.
4. "Good enough never is." Require people to discard products (cookies or sod) that aren't perfect. It's okay to make mistakes, but not to sell them.
5. Everyone has a responsibility to innovate and to replace what no longer works. Feed-back from managers (harvesting, mowing crews, etc.) assist in assuring the highest possible quality for the customers.
6. Every bag of cookies (order of sod) carries a printed invitation to the customer to tell about their experience with the product and service.

If this lady ever prints a book of her management ideas, it's sure to be a best seller. But, as with many other successes, that greatest form of flattery...imitation...can usually give everyone new ideas that can be put to use, whether its cookies or turfgrass sod!

### ABSENTEEISM CAN BE CONTROLLED WITH EASY TO USE METHODS

Just when you think things will run smoothly, that all of the work will get done because of the schedule you've developed, the phone rings and an employee says he/she won't be able to make it in! If that happens too frequently, the business can suffer tremendously, to say nothing of the effects on the owner and manager. But there are several proven actions firms can take to control (if not eliminate) absenteeism.

1. Screen job applicants for absenteeism histories, ask their references if this was a problem before.
2. Don't pay for holidays unless the employee worked normal hours the day before and after the holiday.
3. Employees must talk directly to supervisors when calling in sick.
4. Tie raises and promotions to attendance.
5. Distribute paychecks on the day with the greatest number of absences, usually a Monday or Friday.
6. Have a formal disciplinary policy to address absenteeism.

Absenteeism may also foretell worker comp accident claims according to many personnel managers. They find that workers with high absentee records many not pay as much attention to their jobs as safety would require and they may need additional training and/or supervision.

SHOWING OFF PAYS OFF

Prepared by John McPhail, Vice Chairman  
ASPA Business Management Committee

One way to promote company image and "get the good word spread" about your business is to host a function at your farm. Most local or regional trade associations need and welcome host sites for their meetings. Nothing can take the place of a sod farm with its large green expanse of manicured turfgrass for an inviting, relaxing and workable out-of-doors meeting location.

This past August, my farm was host for the joint summer meeting of the New England Nurserymen's Association, the New Hampshire Landscapers' Association and the New Hampshire Plant Growers' Association. We had over 920 in attendance with 105 exhibitors, some of which were our competitors. Because we were the host, we were able to really "show off" our entire operation to an ideal "audience", something that can't be done from an exhibit booth.

Being a host can help promote your business from within. In the planning and organizing stages, it became apparent that our employees wanted to show the industry how proud they were of their operation, their product, and their commitment to customer service. Therefore, we included each and every one of our employees at the farm and their hard work and pride came shining through. Our employees made the farm their own showcase. They gave guided tours and demonstrated growing and harvesting techniques to all those attending.

Being a host gives you the opportunity to impress the trade association which you are hosting; and in turn, that trade organization will promote you. We are finding this happening in two ways. 1) Impressed landscapers talk to other landscapers, builders talk to builders, etc. 2) Trade organizations provide free press coverage. We had regional news coverage provided the day of the event.

Being a host gives you an excellent excuse to invite VIPs to your operation. They generally will attend and if impressed, they will help promote you within the industry, steer prospective employees your way and refer potential customers to you.

It appears that the rewards of hosting a trade association's function at your farm can be far reaching. It's relatively easy to target whatever trade association you feel would benefit your business the best. And, you are usually guaranteed attendance.

Give it some serious thought and perhaps your farm can benefit just as ours has.



MEMBER MARKETING TIP:

"In our area, the price of turfgrass sod usually drops in the fall of the year. Instead of dropping our price, we have better luck with offering free delivery. People really get excited about getting something for free. It has also been an easier transition to end free delivery rather than raising prices." Ronald D. Nixon, Cowikee Turf, Ltd.

12 POOR MARKETING SYMPTOMS  
IDENTIFIED BY J.R. GRAHAM

John R. Graham, president of Graham Communications in Quincy, Mass., may not be a household name, but his identification of 12 symptoms of poor marketing may land very near the front doors of many businesses, especially turfgrass sod producers who too frequently seem to put marketing very low on their business agenda. Appearing in the July, 1989 issue of "Small Business Reports," Graham's article suggests the following warning signs to poor marketing:

1. Always shooting from the hip--without a defined marketing plan, the firm constantly shifts focus, ads, approaches, etc...never knowing what works or doesn't.
2. Taking action only when sales need beefed-up--marketing only in a slump isn't overly successful because of the lead-time required for most successful campaigns.
3. Make your secretary the Marketing Director--"unprofessional help will produce unprofessional results." (enough said)
4. Duplicate what the competition is doing--the company will always be one step behind, as they wait for the competition's next move. Better would be the program designed to focus on products/services needed by the customers.
5. Failure to do market research--knowing your audience is the only way to influence them to your direction. Without market research, you'll never understand the consumer's needs and wants.
6. Expect huge results with tiny budgets--quality lists, materials and programs all cost, and once again, the firm usually gets what it paid for.
7. Minimize the value of good design--thrown-together materials aren't taken seriously and won't reflect well on the company.
8. Advertise where the rates are lowest--learn where the readers/viewers are that the company wants to target and then pay the price to hit the proper target.
9. Run an ad only once--there's too much competition for the reader's/viewer's time and attention to assume everyone will see a single insertion of an ad. Repeated exposure brings results.
10. Publish a newsletter one a year or less--like single-shot ads, once a year newsletters often cost more than the results they generate.
11. Failure to differentiate direct mail from junk mail--look at what you throw away from your own mail and ask if you'd keep your own mailing?
12. Never seek professional advice--marketing consultants, printers, media experts, all cost the firm, but like any investment, it's not the cost but the return that's important. Buy wisely and use the best you can afford.