



# BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

AMERICAN SOD PRODUCERS ASSOCIATION

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AUGUST / SEPTEMBER, 1990

## SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS TO HOST ASPA'S JANUARY 23-25 MIDWINTER CONFERENCE

Technical and practical speakers, equipment and service exhibits, social and free-time activities will all be combined at the January 23-25, 1991 ASPA Midwinter Conference in San Antonio, Texas.

Even before specific meeting registration and hotel reservation materials are available, ASPA members and exhibiting companies are encouraged to begin making plans to ensure their place at this event. Exhibitors are particularly encouraged to finalize their plans because of the sell-out that was experienced at the 1990 ASPA Conference in Orlando.

Headed by ASPA Vice President Darwin McKay, also serving as the conference program chairman, the educational presentations will offer information on warm and cool season turf production questions, as well as cover business management and environmental topics. The social highlight of the conference will be a "Tex-Mex" night with special food and entertainment that's so famous in San Antonio.

San Antonio's Hyatt Regency Hotel, right on the Riverwalk, will serve as the meeting's headquarters and site of all events, except the "Tex Mex" party.

Additional details will be mailed to all ASPA members, with updates printed in "Turf News" magazine.

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To get free-of-charge statistics on new housing starts and employment figures for your market area, call ASPA at 708/705-9898.  
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FARM EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK DISCLAIMER  
CAN PROTECT EMPLOYER RIGHTS

Having an employee handbook seems like a good idea. It tells all employees what to expect from the company and advises them of the special benefits and privileges of working there. But...a poorly worded handbook can become a trap for the company if a court reads it as a binding employment contract. A properly worded disclaimer is important to protect the employer's right to employment-at-will.

The following disclaimer was recently upheld in court:

"The contents of this Employee Handbook summarize the present ABC programs and policies and are intended as guidelines only. The employee should be aware that these policies and programs may be amended at any time, and that depending upon the particular circumstances of a given situation, the company's actions may vary from written policy. As such, the contents of this handbook DO NOT CONSTITUTE THE TERMS OF A CONTRACT OF EMPLOYMENT. Nothing contained in this handbook should be construed as a guarantee of continued employment, but rather, employment with ABC is on an at-will basis. This means that the employment relationship may be terminated at any time by either the employee or ABC for any reason not expressly prohibited by law. Any written or oral statement to the contrary by a supervisor, corporate officer or other agent of ABC is invalid and should not be relied upon by any prospective or existing employee."

When placed conspicuously in the manual...prominently in the introductory pages of the handbook...such a statement provides considerable protection to the employer.

ASPA's publication, "Turfgrass Sod Farm Employee Handbook" contains several examples of well-written policy manuals and is available to members at a cost of \$5.00 each.

CUT OUT-OF-OFFICE PHONE CHARGES  
FROM HOTEL OR PAY PHONES

Unknown costs and service quality on pay-per-use telephones in hotels or free-standing pay phones can be brought under control by using a simple batch-call system.

Use a company-issued telephone credit card and dial the local long-distance carrier when making your first call. At the end of the first call, push the # button once to stay connected, yet still be able to dial a new number.

The hotel will bill you for only one local call. The pay phone may interrupt your service by seeking more coins, but this too should be at a local-call rate.

TURF\_WARS.....The Year 2001

Prepared by Ron Nixon, Chairman  
ASPA Business Management Committee

It is now the first year of the 21st century. For the most part the Turf Wars of the last decade are over. If we analyze the Turf Wars, we can determine which tactics worked and which did not.

The Turf Wars were hard fought, with many casualties. The wars were devastating for the small turfgrass sod producers, yet today, there are as many small producers as there ever has been, with many of them being new entries into the turfgrass sod industry.

The mid-size producer also suffered greatly. Though many were lost, many survived and some became large producers during the time of the wars.

For the larger producer, acreage alone did not insulate him from becoming a casualty of the Turf Wars. Many of the producers that survived have increased in acreage beyond what anyone would have ever thought years ago.

As we take a closer look at the casualties, we should be able to determine what went wrong. Though each casualty may have had different circumstances such as natural disasters, location, grass variety change or overwhelming competition, one common factor was that by and large, they resisted change and stood with the attitude, "If it has always worked before, let's keep doing it the same way."

The per capita use of turfgrass is now double what it was just a few years ago. If turfgrass did not have the benefits for our environment, this tremendous increase would not have occurred. We remember that 10 short years ago, turfgrass was not viewed as beneficial, but harmful to our environment by many people.

The benefits of the turfgrass plant has increased useage around places where people live, work and play. The utilization of turfgrass has been instrumental in the introduction of waste water back into the environment, the control of soil erosion, as well as many other useages. The sodding of turfgrass has become the preferred form of establishment due to the limited time that has been legally allowed for soil to be left unprotected or disturbed.

This turn-around must be attributed to the marketing efforts of the winners of the Turf Wars. These turfgrass sod producers went on the offensive in marketing their products and also their companies. The positive promotion of one's own company as a producer of the best possible turfgrass sod has resulted in the realization of the financial rewards of a busy and sound business for the winners.

BUYING OR SELLING LAND...  
ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION CAN COST BIG \$\$\$

Turfgrass sod producers buy and sell land with some regularity. While some purchases are for farm expansion or land-trades, many sales are to reduce land holdings and generate profits for the company.

Whether it's buying or selling, the U.S. Comprehensive Environmental Response Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA)...better known as Superfund... gives the Environmental Protection Agency authority to order a clean-up of hazardous wastes, even if the current landowner did not create the pollution. With typical costs running \$6 million to \$9 million each, it's an area that deserve special attention.

Partners in the Elkhart, Indiana law firm of Warrick, Weaver & Boyn suggest eight steps to protect yourself, in the March issue of "Small Business Reports." These are:

1. Tour the site and look for discolored soil, odd vegetation or evidence that something has been buried on the site.
2. Review the manifests of the company currently occupying the site. Are wastes being generated and not properly discarded?
3. Ask the seller for any correspondence from the EPA or state agencies, and contact these agencies yourself.
4. Contact the board of health to determine if they are aware of spills, contamination, etc.
5. Get soil and water tests from an environmental engineer and plan to spend about \$2,000 for this service.
6. Obtain a history of the site to learn what types of operations have taken place on the land.
7. Get an indemnification from the seller, if at all possible.
8. Don't hold industrial real estate in your individual name if at all possible.

When selling land, prospective purchasers may well ask for all of the above information to protect their own future interests.

'SHORT STRIPS' -- Brief helpful hints that can help you today:

"Bereavement" airfares... are available upon request from most airlines for funeral and family medical emergency travel, but you have to ask and may have to offer proof of your need. The discounts vary by airline, as do qualifications.

Get organized by taking the last 30 minutes of your day to plan for the day ahead. Make a schedule for yourself or others, send short thank you notes to customers, clear your work area so it's ready for tomorrow.

Help people, don't sell them whenever you can. When you help a customer, you're doing something for him...when you're selling, you're doing something to him. Finding solutions to the customer's problems will sell the customer on you and your products.

Refuse a partial payment of an outstanding balance that's first offered because the customer can usually do better. As a counter-offer, ask for at least 2/3s of the total and the balance in a post-dated check. You can accept less if necessary, but it's difficult to ask for more once you make or accept an offer for less.