

ISSUE HIGHLIGHTS

'BUSINESS MANAGEMENT'

Newsletter gets a new look, that is designed to help you get more information, faster from ASPA. This page-one column will offer highlights of every article in the issue.

HR 1173 POSES PROBLEMS TO ALL FARMERS, urgent opposition asked of all ASPA members, in a Congressional letter-writing campaign. Sample letter for Congressmen, page 2.

PESTICIDE RECORDS NOW REQUIRED, on all restricted-use products, effective May 10.

MEMBER MARKETING TIP by Chip Lane talks about customer contact.

CLINTON'S ENERGY TAX will cost all farmers more if passed.

CUSTOMER SERVICE ideas will set you apart from competitors, in good times or bad.

MEMBER MARKETING TIP tells how Darwin McKay anticipates customers' needs.

FCC REQUIRES HEARING-AID COMPATIBLE phone where 20 or more employees work.

10 BUSINESS STAGNATION KEYS to avoid in your operation.

ASPA ACTION...

Nashville Summer Convention
July 14-16;

93-94 Membership Dues Due
Plan ahead for Jan. 20-22
Midwinter Conference in AZ.

'HR 1173' Spells Problems for Farmers

All farm owners, not just those using seasonal or migrant labor, will face stiff new labor laws if California Congressman George Miller has his way. Miller, a Democrat, has introduced HR 1173, the "Agricultural Worker Protection Act of 1993," that among other things would:

1. Broaden the coverage of the Migrant and Seasonal Protection Act to include **all farmworkers**, even turfgrass sod farm employees;
2. Require **"written contracts"** with farm laborers specifying the precise days, weeks and months of employment, giving the employee a right to sue for any balance if the job is shortened, **for any reason**;
3. Require farms to **provide child care** whenever 25 or more workers are employed for even a single day;
4. Allow employees to bring **private law suits** against employers for any violation of other federal, state and local health and safety laws, regardless of the findings of the agency and other penalties paid;
5. Eliminate the **exclusivity of workers' compensation**, allowing an injured employee to collect workers' comp payments, and sue the employer for additional damages;
6. **Increase statutory damages** workers could collect under the law from \$500 to \$2,000, with the potential that even a minor paperwork violation could result in fines of \$250,000 per plaintiff, per violation.

ASPA, and practically every other farm organization, has joined together to oppose this legislation because it would actually harm the very workers it is supposed to protect and it could result in many farms simply going out of business.

Although committee hearings have not yet begun, at the time of this newsletter, **all ASPA Members are encouraged to write their Congressman to oppose any consideration of HR 1173.** A sample letter is presented on Page 2 of this newsletter. Please provide ASPA a copy of your letter so that an accurate file of member opinion and action can be assembled for future use in organized opposition to this legislation.

Restricted Use Pesticide Records Required by USDA ...Effective Date of May 10, 1993

All private and commercial applicators of restricted use pesticides must now maintain written records of chemical usage that includes the following information:

1. Brand name and EPA registration number;
2. Total amount of pesticide used;
3. Location of application, size of area, crop, commodity or site to which the pesticide was applied;
4. the month, day and year of treatment;
5. name and certification number of applicator.

Records must be made within 30 days of application, maintained for a minimum of two years and made available to state and federal authorities. Violators are liable for civil penalties of \$500 for the first offense and \$1000 for subsequent offenses.

Sample Letter To Oppose HR 1173...

Please Revise and Retype onto Your Company Letterhead

The Honorable _____
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative _____:

California Congressman George Miller has introduced legislation that must be strongly opposed.

The "Agricultural Worker Protection Act of 1993," (H.R. 1173), proposes to establish labor standards and liabilities upon America's farmers well beyond those being faced by any other employer. This legislation would broaden the definition of the Migrant and Seasonal Worker Protection Act to encompass **all agricultural employees**. If allowed to become law, H.R. 1173 would :

Require employer provided child day care centers;

Hold farm owners strictly liable for all farm labor contractor violations, even those beyond the control of the owner;

Allow agricultural employees the right to sue their employer for work-related injuries, even if previously compensated by workers compensation; and employees could sue for violations of all federal, state and local health and safety laws;

It would further allow employees to sue for additional compensation if weather or seasonal conditions cause a shortening of the original requirement for workers.

As the owner of a turfgrass sod farm in your Congressional District, and an employer of XXX seasonal and full-time employees, I am frightened by the prospects of this proposal becoming law. It represents the strongest challenge to this farm's ability to remain in business and to continue to employ anyone. This law would not protect migrant and seasonal agricultural workers, or anyone else, it clearly threatens the entire agricultural industry in the United States.

I ask that your strongly and vigorously oppose H.R. 1173.

Sincerely,

(Please send a copy of your letter and any response you receive to ASPA)

Member Marketing Tip

By Chip Lain, Pine Island Turf
Pine Island, New Jersey

LEAVE YOUR CUSTOMERS ALONE

I have found that once you "win" a customer, it is sometimes best to let your product and service speak for itself. Repetitive calling or visiting may prompt too close a relationship where negotiations will become too common. You have done the hardest work by getting the customer to buy your sod. Keep tabs on your success with the customer through your office staff and truck drivers -- they will usually be able

to tell you if the customer is satisfied with your company.

I am not suggesting that you should not visit a customer, rather that the customer should feel comfortable enough to call you if there is any problem.

Throughout the year we do keep in touch with our customers. First, we send out a Spring mailing to customers and prospects. Also, a Summer letter is sent out, followed by a Christmas card to all of our customers. We attend trade

shows in the winter months -- this is a great way to talk with customers about the up-coming year, as well as meeting new prospects.

Reward your customer. We have a continuous supply of gifts consisting of hats, pens, magnets, calendars, etc. Not only is this a great way of thanking our customers, but more importantly, it is a smart way to keep our name in front of them -- constantly reminding them where to turn for all of their sod needs.

Clinton Energy Tax Costly for Farms

If President Bill Clinton receives approval of his plan to raise taxes on energy, the U.S. turfgrass sod producers will pay for more than just higher diesel and oil.

According to figures released by the United States Department of Agriculture, fertilizer, pesticides and other indirect users of energy would also have higher prices. The USDA estimates that all farms in the U.S. used 667 trillion BTUs worth of fertilizer in 1991 and 115 trillion BTUs worth of pesticides in 1989. More than 32 million BTUs go into making a ton of fertilizer.

While the tax proposals seem to change on a daily basis, at a tax rate of 25.7-cents per million BTUs for coal, natural gas and nuclear energy, and a rate of 59.9-cents per million BTUs for oil-related products, the cost of gasoline would increase by 7.5-cents per gallon, diesel would rise by 8.3-cents per gallon and propane would go up by 2.3-cents per gallon.

Although some farmers and producers of other items may be able to pass along these increased costs to consumers, it is highly unlikely that the sod producers would be able to do so.

Customer Service Can Position Your Farm & Sod Apart From Others

Sod is sod, is sod. Right? Maybe to some people, but it doesn't have to be that way for everyone. You can set your farm and sod apart from the competitors by placing more emphasis on customer service. During good times or bad, treating the customer right will typically pay high returns on a rather modest investment.

The following list of possible customer service techniques can be just a starting place for ideas that you can develop for your own purposes. While it's not a

good idea to attempt all of them at once, a gradual implementation plan, can move you in the right direction...ahead of your competitors:

1. **Share your knowledge** of turfgrass with your customers and their customers. Through seminars or talks about sod production, maintaining turf or other basic programs, you can expand your position as an expert.

2. **Listen to your customers** when they talk about you and about your competitors. Let them tell you what's of importance to them and what they want from you.

3. **Stand by your guarantee**, no matter what. If customer service and satisfaction is a primary point in dealing with your company, then demonstrate it by your actions.

4. **Keep your customers informed** about new developments and improvements. It may not mean an immediate sale, but they'll appreciate knowing and being informed.

5. **Show your appreciation** with a customer lunch or coffee. Let them know you appreciate their trust in you and how much they've helped your business succeed.

Good customers are hard to find, keep everyone you can ever get with service.

Why is Soup Different From Bread or Milk?

If 69% of all consumers think that all brands of milk are alike, and 38% feel there's no difference in packaged white bread, why would 68% of these same people believe that one brand of canned soup is better than all others?

Apparently, soup, as well as cold cereal, tea and headache remedy makers have done a better job of showing why they are different.

Customer perception is what counts!

Member Marketing Tip

ANTICIPATE YOUR CUSTOMER'S NEEDS!

Jack, a small landscaper, enters our central farm area to load a pallet of sod on his pickup and a pallet on his trailer. Once the load is in place, Jack notices that the air pressure in his trailers' tires is not adequate to carry the load. Our customer sales agent quickly informs Jack that we have compressed air available and easily accessible for use.

Jack travels several hundred feet in the yard to the air hose which is easy and quick to use to correct the air pressure problem. The turf farm staff had anticipated and prepared the necessary arrangements to take care of this situation quickly and effectively. The customer left with a feeling of satisfaction and value added.

Other ways we can anticipate the customer's need are:

1. Make sure the customer has everything needed to complete the job, i.e., fertilizer, plastic edging and the necessary tools;

2. Make sure your customer has proper instructions for installation and maintenance;

3. Be ready to respond to a customer's urgency or time frame by working quickly to accommodate them;

4. Offer to load the product or carry materials to their car or pickup.

By Darwin McKay, The Turf Co.
Meridian, Idaho

Hearing-aid compatible Phones required by FCC

If you have 20 or more employees in your workplace, your telephones must be hearing-aid compatible according to the U.S. Federal Communications Commission (FCC).

In a little-publicized regulation adopted by the FCC, to meet the standards of the Hearing Aid Compatibility Act, all phones must be usable by individuals who use hearing aids. Depending upon the phone system in use, retrofitting can cost from \$16 to \$70 each phone.

Each violation is punishable by a fine of up to \$10,000 a day, to a maximum of \$75,000.

10 Keys to Business Loss & Stagnation

1. That will never work here.
2. We're doing just fine with what we've got.
3. That's being looked at.
4. We're not big enough yet.
5. We can't do that.
6. We've always done it this way.
7. It's not in our budget.
8. We tried that already.
9. We don't want the responsibility.
10. We'll see.

ASPA Action

SUMMER CONVENTION...NASHVILLE, TN...JULY 14-16

An expanding variety of new and improved turfgrass sod production equipment will be displayed and demonstrated at ASPA's Summer Convention this July 14-16. Perhaps more new companies than ever before will be on-hand to show everyone how their product can improve sod production.

Hosted at the Thomas Bros. Grass Co. Nashville farm, two full days will be conducted on the farm, giving members greater opportunity to see the equipment at work and then to discuss how it would help their operation. The static displays, seed test plots and equipment areas will be opened Thursday and Friday, with bus transportation scheduled to meet the needs of the members.

In addition to the business of farm operations, other highlights of the Convention will include an educational session on Wednesday focusing on the issuance of credit and the annual business meeting featuring reports from the leadership and the election of new officers and trustees.

Housed at the famed Opryland Hotel, there will also be time and ample opportunity for social activities at the Grand Ole Opry, the neighboring theme park, riverboat rides and even championship golf.

Advance registration is recommended so that printed badges can be prepared, along with complete convention information packets.

Additional copies of complete registration information are available by contacting the ASPA office at 708/705-9898 or faxing a request to 708/705-8347.

1993-94 MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS SENT TO EVERYONE

All current ASPA members were sent renewal notices for the 1993-94 membership year that officially begins July 1. For U.S., Class A members, renewing on or before the July 1 deadline will mean an additional \$1,000 of accidental death and dismemberment insurance, up to a maximum of \$12,000.

To avoid disruption of ASPA benefits, members are encouraged to submit their renewal forms as early as possible. When renewing, please note any changes to membership information such as company contact, address, phone, fax and sod types produced.

PLAN AHEAD...

ASPA Midwinter Conference, January 20-22, 1994
Wyndham Paradise Valley Resort, Scottsdale, Arizona

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

American Sod Producers Association

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