

THE FRONT OFFICE

OPINION PAGE

PLAYING BY THE NUMBERS



They say numbers don't lie. That may be true, but they are frequently overlooked. We recently came upon some numbers that tell a very interesting story about the sports turf market.

The departments of agriculture in many states carry out a periodic census of the acreage in agricultural production. A few states, with the support of their state turf associations, take this census a step further and track the acreage of maintained turfgrass. Maryland is one of those states.

In 1987, the Maryland Turfgrass Council financed a second turfgrass survey by the department of agriculture. The goal was to show the progress and growth of the turfgrass industry and its influence on the state's economy since the last census in 1979. Instead of asking just for acreage, the survey included questions on maintenance costs, labor, equipment purchases, chemical purchases, and more.

The new survey included something overlooked in the first survey—athletic fields. The results brought home something we've believed all along, that the industry has been overlooking a market which is second only to residential turf in acreage! The survey showed that athletic fields are second in acreage only to home lawns in the state. Ten percent of the maintained turf in the state is athletic fields. Golf courses comprise six percent of the state's maintained turf. Home lawns are roughly 40 percent.

If you add maintenance of the grounds around parks and schools to athletic fields and golf courses, you find that 30 percent of the maintained turf in Maryland is managed by sports turf managers.

The total maintenance costs for all sports turf in Maryland alone is more than \$200 million dollars! That is more than was spent during the same year for residential turf! Ten million dollars more to be exact.

The Maryland survey also reinforces a recent National Golf Foundation maintenance survey showing that golf course maintenance costs have increased significantly in the past decade—almost ten percent per year. But the biggest surprise was that golf course superintendents utilize maintenance dollars more effectively than athletic field managers. An average golf course in Maryland spends \$1,500 per acre per year for maintenance while an average sports facility spends \$1,975.

Something tells me that sports turf managers didn't fill out the survey for athletic fields, the park directors and superintendents of schools did. I doubt strongly if any athletic field manager, with the exception of those at major stadiums, would believe that their budgets are comparable to golf courses. Certainly, if you consider that much of a golf course is rough, the figures make more sense. But you can't maintain a heavily-used athletic field like a golf course rough. A tee would be more like it.

The point is that Maryland has taken a big step toward getting solid, numerical data on athletic fields. If the 49 other states followed suit, we would have an open and shut case for the value of athletic field turf in this country.

The National Golf Foundation estimated that \$3.58 billion was spent on golf course maintenance in the U.S. in 1987. If we play a numbers game and take Maryland as an average state, the cost of maintenance of athletic fields in this country is conceivably \$6.35 billion! If we add golf, parks and schools together, the total is easily over ten billion dollars.

With that kind of investment in turf each year, we strongly believe that the sports turf manager who is responsible for this tremendous national asset should be well-trained, well-respected and well-compensated. That's what we believed three years ago when we started **sportsTURF**, and that's what we believe today. The numbers are getting too large to overlook anymore.

Bruce Shank

EVENTS

CALENDAR

JUNE

8

Rutgers Turfgrass Field Day, Turfgrass Center, Hort Farm II, Cook College, Ryders Lane, New Brunswick, NJ. Contact: Dr. Henry Indyk, Soils & Crops Dept., Cook College, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ 08903, (201) 932-9453.

16

Sixth Annual Field Day, Turf-Seed Inc./Pure Seed Testing, Hubbard, OR. Contact: Pam, Turf-Seed Inc., P.O. Box 250, Hubbard, OR 97032, (800) 247-6910.

22

Midwest Sports Turf Institute, College of DuPage, DuPage, IL. Contact: Sports Turf Managers Association, 400 N. Mountain Ave., Suite 301, Upland, CA 91786, (714) 981-9199, or Susan Glasgow, College of DuPage, Glen Ellyn, IL, (312) 858-2800, Ext. 2770.

JULY

12

Eastern Sports Turf Institute, College of the Holy Cross, Worcester, MA. Contact: PGMS, 12 Galloway Ave., Cockeysville, MD 21030, (301) 667-1833, or STMA, 400 N. Mountain, Suite 301, Upland, CA 91786, (714) 981-9199.

19-20

Athletic Facilities Maintenance Seminar, Mulberry Street Recreation Center, City of Lenoir, NC. Contact: Professional Grounds Management Society, 12 Galloway Ave., Suite 1E, Cockeysville, MD 21030, (301) 667-1833.

25-27

International Lawn, Garden & Power Equipment Exposition, Kentucky Fair and Exposition Center, Louisville, KY. Contact: Katie Stanford, Expo 88, (800) 558-8767.