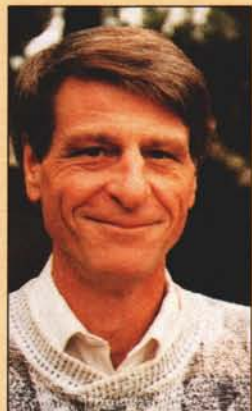
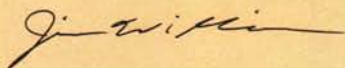


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Watch the Hidden Costs

From what I've seen, the following observations by STMA member Mike DePew accurately describe much of the turfgrass industry.



Searching for Principles

By Michael DePew

As a sports turf manager, your most valuable, and vulnerable, asset is what's in your head.

One thing in it may be the "information" regularly presented to you from sales people and advertisements. This information is often perceived as "free." But it often accompanies the purchase of a product, and the hidden cost may be high if the product is unnecessary or only provides short-term benefits.

To avoid hidden costs, your top priority should always be a quest for the most accurate information possible. But the quest takes patience, experience, good record keeping and a critical mind. It requires taking advantage of the many educational opportunities available through turf associations, universities and cooperative extensions. It also means monitoring your field conditions, reviewing data you've recorded and evaluating the cause-effect relationships that occur with treatments or practices.

This approach goes beyond simply knowing that "adding nitrogen increases growth, color and turf quality." It also includes knowing how an application of N (quantity, timing and form) influences soil pH, the salt content and composition of the root zone, thatch development, plant available water, and other parts of the ecosystem.

Without a sufficient understanding of the turf you manage, you'll likely fall victim to a product-based style of management in order to maintain acceptable quality sports turf.

What is "product-based management"? It is the liberal use of marketed amendments or equipment without a thorough knowledge of why they work or if their use is necessitated. It is a common approach today partly because of the lack of government involvement in the turfgrass industry.

In traditional agriculture, government has sponsored research that has led to great advancements. In urban agriculture, however, government has not played as prominent a role. In urban agriculture, research is primarily driven by industry.

While this type of research is not necessarily biased, you should realize it is self-promoting. It is a product- or equipment-based research (commercial) and not always a search for scientific principles.

The question then arises: If you aren't willing to investigate and understand the principles that apply to the management of your turf, who is? The answer is obvious: the one who stands to make money off your management style by supplying you with a product that will "solve your problem."

When confronted by commercial information, I suggest you evaluate its reliability. Make sure the concept behind the product makes sense to you. If it has some merits in concept, ask for published information behind its testing. Be wary of testimonials and call up the individuals cited to verify the accuracy. Also, be wary of recent testimonials; rather, locate someone who is familiar with the product over a longer period of time and wider range of conditions. To grow better, safer sports turf as economically as possible, always ask questions.

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