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On the cover: The Sports Turf Managers Association's 2006 Schools/Parks Baseball Field of the Year is Gaebelein Field at the Wesleyan School in Norcross, GA.



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From the Sidelines

## Turfgrass seed prices will increase



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**T**urfgrass seed companies are scrambling now to make deals and sign 2007 production contracts with growers. Getting supply agreements is tough in today's market, which has seen an increased demand for acres to grow corn and wheat fuel the (pun intended) "craze for bio-diesel and ethanol."

Glenn Jacklin, director of operations at Jacklin Seed, a division of Simplot, says all species of turfgrass prices are on the rise. "The demand for acres to grow crops other than turfgrass is rising, so the supply of acres is decreasing. The high commodity prices mean shrinking acreage for us," Jacklin says. "There's a tight market coming this fall for 2008 production."

Another factor in higher seed prices, particularly for bluegrass, is a recent change in Idaho law that prohibits open field burning. "This issue is playing a big part in the instability of the market," says Jacklin. The state produces 40% of the country's bluegrass needs, says Jacklin, but the no-burn law (bluegrass yields drop significantly if there is no burning at least every 2 years) won't stop bluegrass production entirely.

"Sixty-five to 70% of bluegrass production is done on Indian reservations, which operate under entirely different rules than the rest of the country," says Jacklin. "That takes the sting out of Idaho's decision."

"The ripple effect however is that wheat growers won't be able to burn their wheat stubble this year, which means right now 2008 and 2009 look bleak," he says.

Another plus is that there's no burning necessary to get good bluegrass yields in the Columbia Basin of Washington State. "Processors can secure acreage in this region but it costs more money per acre to do so," says Jacklin. "There will be availability of bluegrass in the fall and next spring but it will be tighter than in the past. It remains to be seen just how tight."

Jacklin says end users can expect to see a 15-20% increase in the price of bluegrass seed. "The cost of energy for producers has doubled; grower and supplier costs are up. In the past research has produced super yielding crops without compromising quality but I'm not sure yet what the answers are now," he says.

"Seed price levels have languished since the 1980's because of these higher-yield advancements but it's catching up to us now," Jacklin says. "The market is basically crashing. Genetic advancements that increase yields will be incremental now."

Jacklin says he's having fun with the new situation and that it has "revved up his engines" as he works now to set up supply agreements. "All seed companies are in the same boat; you can expect higher prices for awhile," he says. "Those that offer the best customer service will 'win'."

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## President's Message

# Integrity perseveres through tough times

**W**hile our crew was wrestling Mother Nature for every event this spring, it was humbling when at certain points we just had to wave a flag and give in. For a profession that dedicates itself to consistent footing and playability, we seemingly started each day with a new menu of weather variables.

The crew felt like we lived that cooking show where the secret ingredient is given and then the chefs have an hour in which to prepare five elaborate dishes. At the end of the day, coaches played out their events on the fields and rendered a judgment on our work. Many nights after dark we'd walk to our cars and wonder how anyone could work in our profession and still carry himself or herself as an "Iron Chef" of turf. We can and we must. Good job everyone! We may not have always excelled – sometimes the victory was to simply survive.

It's not always the product we produce that sets us apart. It's the cues we give that propel our crews, coaches, and players to appreciate the environment that we all share. A friend of mine would say, "Any one can sail a ship in calm seas, it takes a real captain to sail when the water is angry." When colleagues see us battling hard and getting the job done in spite of obstacles, they appreciate this is more than just a job.

We all have difficult and grueling times, but as sports turf managers we focus on sailing the ship and hosting events. Many of our challenges don't involve today's weather or this week's workload. We get off course because of personnel or administrative issues.

Being an STMA member can be a source you can turn to for professional and personal friendships and enrichment. If you're taking on water you can bet there are more people out there feeling the same way. Pick up the phone, shoot off an e-mail and let those close to you know they're important to you. Above all, let your co-workers know that each of them is crucial to the program and your team.

Take a minute of your busy day and read the present STMA Bylaws. Ken Mrock and the Bylaws Committee did duty updating this doctrine last year, and we passed the revisions in December. Our Constitution is this document! The last four pages of the Bylaws define the STMA Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct Guidelines. Become familiar with both sections. When each of us became a member it was implied that we agree to follow the Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct Guidelines. If we're professing professionalism and honor as qualifications to being successful in our careers we do ourselves a favor by embracing both documents. When I was introduced to STMA I found the members, above anything else, to be people of high integrity and trust. We need to ensure that each person who finds us sees it that way.



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# Seeding strategies that work

By Mark G. Grundman



**O**ver the past several years problems have cropped up either from man-made situations or naturally, all causing a strong shift in the populations of grasses on our athletic fields. This shift in most cases has lead to higher populations of non-desirable grasses and an increase in overall management costs.

In the past, field managers have attempted interseeding (seeding into an existing population, to control this shift in population) in one form or another with limited success. Some researchers and investigators will tell you the failures outnumber the successes by a wide margin. If odds are stacked against this process, why should we keep trying to intraseed? There are several answers, and in this article I hope to give you some



Chicago high school football field before interseeding. Photo courtesy Phil Hargarden.



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Same field after interseeding. Photo courtesy Phil Hargarden.

insight into new concepts to shifting the population back in our favor.

Sometimes turf managers will try to improve existing stands by seeding with improved cultivars because they offer better disease resistance, traffic tolerance, and life at lower mowing heights. Older varieties and species are not adaptable to lower heights of cut and have a tendency to thin when mowed at excessively low heights for long periods of time. Once under stress disease patterns start to show, again thinning your playing surface. This in turn allows other grassy weeds to encroach into your fields. Perhaps one of the largest reasons behind an attempt to change our turf population is our old friends *Poa annua*, *Poa trivialis*, knotweed, and crabgrass to mention a few, which will invade when stressful conditions exist.

Often I hear "Well if my current grasses do not survive, then *Poa annua* will save the day." Unfortunately, with shrinking budgets, the cost of maintaining a *Poa annua* or high weed populated field has become quite expensive, not to mention increasing the potential for injuries. Thus, the need for grass replacement with a species or variety that is adapted to day-to-day usage is needed to help compensate for these problems.

### Setting up a program

My experience shows turf managers that set up a plan to interseed have the most success rather than those that just run out with the seed at the first crack of cool weather. The first step to a successful plan is to answer the question, "Why should I seed?" Typically, your answer will be one of the following:

- To increase density.
- To change the genetic variability to my field.
- To increase the overall disease resistance.
- To build better wear tolerance.
- To build better uniformity and color into our grassed areas.

In giving this a great deal of thought, I find that of all the problems faced by athletic field managers, wear and undesirable species, especially *Poa annua*, come to the top of the list of why they interseed.

When battling any foe, it is important to "know thy enemy." A review of the strengths and weaknesses of *Poa annua*, for instance, would give us an idea of how to attack this problem on site. We find that *Poa annua*:

- Invades whenever we have a problem with our fields.
- Disrupts the uniformity of any athletic field.
- Costs an enormous amount of money to create a constant uniformity with this species.
- Faces declining shoot density during the summer months.
- Dies when subject to heavy traffic and other summer stresses.
- Recovers due to a prolific seed bank but not until year's end.

In the past, we almost always tried to interseed into fields when the species or problem we are competing against are at their strongest. An evaluation of problems and when said problems are at their weakest will lead us to proper times for interseeding. (In the case of fighting *Poa annua*, we would plan to seed just before its death, i.e., anytime after *Poa annua*