



Background

The turfgrass industry is an important industry in New York State. Close to 3.5 million acres in the state are covered with turfgrass, consisting of lawns, parks, golf courses, sports fields, sod farms, industrial and institutional grounds, rights of way, etc. The turfgrass industry contributed five billion dollars to turf maintenance expenses in 2003 to the state's economy. Additionally the 2003 New York Turfgrass Survey documents that New York employed over 43,000 employees who had turf maintenance as their primary responsibility. The cost of total payroll for employees in 2003 was nearly \$467 million. Over 843,000 acres of new turf was established in 2003 at a cost of nearly \$1.56 billion. Residents of New York benefit from turf in every day life. Quality turfgrass provides countless environmental benefits such as holding rainfall for groundwater recharge, filtering pollutants, absorbing sound, cooling the air temperature, and providing plentiful, clean oxygen. Dense, healthy turfgrass provides a safe playing surface for our children and athletes of all ages as well as beautifies and softens our urban landscapes. Turfgrass has a major influence on the quality of life for New Yorkers.

NYSTA Perspective

It is the mission of NYSTA to promote professionalism through education and research, while advocating environmentally responsible management. Turfgrass managers are constantly challenged to meet consumer expectations for quality and safety while complying with increasing regulation that does not recognize the lack of available alternatives. The science to date tells us that we can have healthy turf and preserve and protect environmental quality. More research is needed to provide improved turf management solutions.

Environmental research looks beyond the traditional agronomic aspects of turfgrass science and seeks to determine the influence of the practices on the environment. Issues such as water quality protection, Integrated Pest Management that strives to reduce reliance on pesticides, and the development of biological control practices that enhance the ecological compatibility of turf systems are a few of the many efforts currently underway. Additionally, we are assessing future needs beyond the challenges of today and expect to begin projects that reduce reliance on potable water and use effluent water for golf courses.

Product development that enhances turf quality while protecting the environment is critical. New crop protectants are exhibiting vast improvements in chemistry. Turfgrass biotechnology could create disease and insect resistant turfgrass plants that withstand heavy traffic and require much less water.

Obviously there are many challenges facing the turfgrass industry throughout New York State. Traditionally, research and information dissemination has been accomplished through Cornell University and the Extension Service. County financial support has been drastically reduced in many areas of the state and this has negatively impacted the turfgrass industry. A state supported fund would allow grant requests to be made directly to industry representatives who could then prioritize research and education efforts. In a rapidly growing industry, we believe practitioners in partnership with university researchers can identify research needs to improve management practices.

Recommendation

* A line item of \$175,000 in the budget for The Turfgrass Environmental Stewardship Fund.