

TURF WARS

The turfgrass industry has been under attack from environmental activists for over a decade. But it has only been in the past few years that the attack has been most direct.

Activists may be well-intentioned, but they are misinformed about the benefits of healthy, well-managed turf. Their attacks are mostly emotional and lack scientific validity.

The Tampa Bay Estuary Program (TBEP) has offered "science" that activists have promoted. But TBEP science relies on questionable statistical modeling that lacks independent peer review. TBEP and activists advocate a four-month summer ban of all residential fertilizer applications, which scientific studies have shown will be counterproductive.

In 2008, activist groups sued the EPA, saying that it had not done enough to protect the State's waterways, citing algae blooms as a result. The EPA settled the lawsuit by signing a consent decree to set legal limits for nutrients (primarily phosphorous and nitrogen) in Florida waterways. The EPA held a series of public hearings and will soon announce the limits, called Numeric Nutrient Criteria (NNC).

The prospect of one-size-fits-all NNC across the State has generated widespread opposition from numerous stakeholders, but the limits will come. Significantly, the onus will be on local municipalities to comply, which has left many of them looking for answers.

Last year, the State legislature tried to bring clarity to water issues through the passage of Senate Bill #494. The

bill includes a model fertilizer ordinance that specifies amount, timing and certifications required for fertilizer applications. The ordinance also requires scientific documentation and approval by FDEP, IFAS and FDACS for adoption of local ordinances that are more stringent than the State model.

Until recently the turfgrass industry believed peer-reviewed science, BMP's and SB#494 would suffice. Unfortunately this has not been the case.

Activists have campaigned for adoption of the TBEP proposal. And the Tampa Bay Policy Board (which is comprised of environmental protection officials from Pinellas, Hillsborough, Manatee, Pasco and Polk Counties, plus the municipalities within these counties) has pledge support for the four month ban.

It appears that the bans are going forward despite the fact that peer-reviewed science indicates the bans will do more harm to the environment than good. The bans are going forward despite the concerns of FDACS, FDEP and IFAS. The bans are going forward based on emotion, political expediency and the threat that activists will campaign against any opposition.

So, what will happen when these bans don't work? What next? What new municipalities (activists are working all over the State); what additional inputs (pesticides? water? sod varieties?); and what new industry sectors will be next? Golf is exempt from the new ordinances; "for now". Activist objectives are clear, "Turf is a dinosaur

that needs to be encouraged into extinction," said one of the group's leaders.

Beyond aesthetics, healthy turf is nature's best filter. Weakened turf is more prone to disease, weeds and other pests. Studies show that poor turf quality can result in lower real estate values. It can also adversely impact surface play, which in turn can decrease a club's income from lower green fees, and less spent on merchandise and food and beverage.

The industry must act now. It must show solidarity and support residential fertilizer applications, which is our first line of defense. As the umbrella association representing all industry sectors, the FTGA needs the support of all industry participants, not just a few. The FTGA needs money to carry on the fight, and it needs size to enhance our standing in Tallahassee.

The industry must change the dialogue and the debate. We all want safe, quality water. So we need to show our concern through ongoing environmental stewardship; embracing sound, peer-reviewed science. Our opponents are activists who seek emotionally-charged, but unsubstantiated change. We should counter with our emotion over lost jobs and revenues that they have caused, but we must keep clean water as our primary objective.

Finally, the industry must build a war chest to fund research and education. The FTGA has proposed to create "environmental assessments" for those

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industry sectors that are under attack. In this way fertilizer, pesticides, irrigation equipment, enhanced turf varieties and other industry inputs can fund a unified response to activists' actions.

Under the proposal each industry input would be asked to pay a small environmental assessment ... less than one-half of one percent of product sales. Half of the assessment would be retained in the corresponding industry sector, and the other half would go to a larger industry-wide fund that is collaboratively managed.

As adherents to the scientific method, we in the industry need more research. Research is our ally. Education is our tool. We need to be sure that we are educating industry participants so that we can continually improve our craft. We need education to reach out to policy makers. And we need to educate the general population that healthy, well-managed turf provides many environmental benefits.



Annual Conference & Show

The Florida Turfgrass Association (FTGA) will host its 58th Annual Conference & Show from September 15 - 17, 2010. The Conference will be held at the Caribe Royale in Orlando, Florida.

The Conference group rate is \$99.00 per night.

The Conference & Show Committee is pleased with the selection of the Caribe Royale because it is responsive to the wishes of the FTGA membership as expressed in the survey conducted following the 2009 Conference & Show. Specifically, the FTGA was able to find an Orlando-area site at under \$100 per night that could accommodate all attendees. In addition, the Caribe Royale offers the perfect business venue, while also accommodating those who wanted some family-oriented experiences.

At the Caribe Royale All-Suite Hotel and Convention Center, business and pleasure go hand in hand. From the very beginning, they have redefined and elevated the standards of the meeting, conference and family vacation experience in Florida. Here among the more than 53 lush, tropical acres, FTGA attendees will discover 1,218 spacious, well-appointed one-bedroom suites, 120 luxurious two-bedroom lakeside villas, expansive state-of-the-art meeting and event facilities, unmatched hospitality and service, and a wealth of desirable dining options and hotel amenities that will appeal to business professionals and families alike. And it all can be found just minutes from the area's world famous theme parks and attractions.

Stay tuned as the conference registration package is coming soon.

Reasons To Join

The challenges being faced by the turfgrass industry are many. Beyond economic downturn, we are dealing with restrictions on the amount and type of turf used, water allocations, the impending loss of methyl bromide, MSMA and potentially other pesticides and fertilizer black-out periods, among other issues.

Today more than ever we need the Florida Turfgrass Association to help us take on these and similar challenges. And the FTGA needs your continued support so that we can do our jobs more effectively.

Advocacy is just one benefit that the FTGA brings to the industry. We also offer networking opportunities; we help keep you abreast of industry changes; we host conferences and seminars for valuable CEUs; and we provide much needed funding to turfgrass research and education.

We will embark on programs that will bring millions of dollars into research and education. We will work closely with aligned industry sectors so that we are presenting a unified front. And we will strive to get out in front of the actions of environmental activists and others who are among to bring our industry down.

To join the FTGA, visit www.FTGA.org or contact the office for an application.

Conference & Show Presenting Sponsors



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