

Sales Jobs For Turfgrass Grads

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.) — While rising inflation and population growth have led to decreased opportunities in most areas of the job marketplace, these factors have had the opposite effect on Pennsylvania's turfgrass industry.

"Industry sales representatives are capitalizing on urban sprawl — or the trend since the 1950s for traditional city dwellers to move to more rural areas to establish homes and businesses," said Dr. Thomas Watschke, Penn State professor of turfgrass science.

According to the recent Department of Agriculture's turfgrass survey, there are about two million acres of turf in Pennsylvania that require maintenance.

"A total of \$1.46 billion was spent in 1989 to maintain home lawns, athletic fields, parks, campgrounds, private corporation land, and roadsides.

"Turf is a major industry," Watschke said. "We can't fill all the available jobs."

Penn State students interested in working in the turf industry are enrolled in the College of Agricultural Science's agronomy curriculum, with an emphasis in turfgrass courses. However, Watschke said that the department hopes to offer a turfgrass science major for the fall 1992 term. The new major is pending approval by Penn State's board of trustees.

Turfgrass scientists are qualified to work as consultants to civil engineering firms or major landscaping companies. "They can start their own businesses, get jobs as government environmentalists, or be sales representatives for lawn, farm fertilizer, or chemical companies," he said. "Throughout the industry, starting salaries in sales range from \$25,000 to \$30,000."

Professional salespeople in the turfgrass industry were among those attending the 1992 Western Pennsylvania Turf Conference and Trade Show. Sponsored by Penn State and the Pennsylvania Turfgrass Council, the conference featured a series of research lectures and about 80 exhibits of new turf products and maintenance equipment. More than 1,500 turf scientists and managers from western Pennsylvania and northern Ohio attended the event.

"I started out making about \$25,000," said Jamie Heydinger, field technical representative for The Scotts Company's Medina, Ohio office. A 1987 graduate of Ohio State University's turfgrass science program, he attended the conference to deliver a lecture on the proper selection of turfgrass species and to exhibit company products at the trade show.

Heydinger is responsible for

Scotts' athletic field accounts in Ohio and Pennsylvania. "There is a big emphasis on high school and college sports in this area of the country," he said. "Turf on athletic fields is under constant use. It's a challenge to keep the fields in good shape. When I visit a customer, I sample the soil first. Then together we work out a fertilizer treatment schedule to keep the field healthy year-round. I put about 40,000 miles on my company car last year travelling between customers. And when I'm not on the road, I'm on the phone."

Other turfgrass science graduates may sell maintenance equipment. "An equipment sales representative can make about \$3,000 a month plus commission," said Paul Brandon, district sales manager for Ryan and Cushman Turf Equipment in Exton, Pa.

"Usually, you have to have some practical experience either

working on a golf course or as a turf manager someplace else," said Brandon, who earned a plant science degree from Rutgers.

One way to gain experience is to sell landscaping supplies to golf courses, according to Colin Boyd, president of Boyd Turf Industries, New Wilmington. "A sales representative for my company would have to travel between major golf courses and would probably start out earning about \$22,000 a year, plus commission," he said. "I would hire a graduate from a turfgrass science program because I know that person would be able to speak the customer's language."

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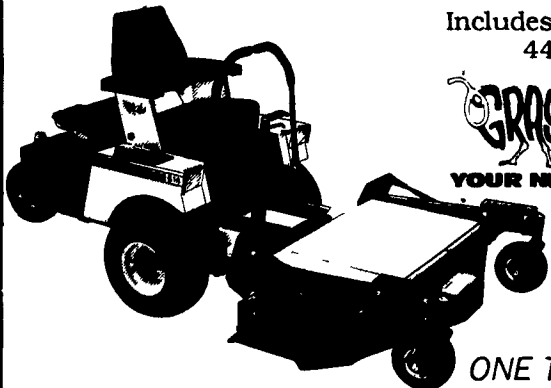
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