

## American Dream Leads To Industry's Success

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.) — The American dream of owning land has led to a boom in the turfgrass industry, said a Penn State researcher.

"Everybody wants a piece of the country before it's gone," said Dr. Thomas Watschke, professor of turfgrass science. "As more farmland is lost to development, and urban sprawl continues to creep across the country, more and more acres are created that need to be landscaped.

"Unlike other agribusinesses which have suffered during the recession, the turfgrass industry has continued to thrive and even grow," said Watschke. "Among Pennsylvania agricultural enterprises, turf is second only to animal products in terms of economic value."

Watschke says it's difficult to place a monetary value upon an industry that has only sod as a cash crop. But in 1989, Pennsylvanians spent \$1.46 billion to maintain close to 2 million acres of turf, according to a survey con-

ducted by the Pennsylvania Turfgrass Council and the state Department of Agriculture.

The survey broke down the total turfgrass area in the state and determined maintenance expenses for industry segments such as homes, golf courses, and roadsides. It showed turfgrass maintenance and production was a diverse industry and that increased property development has played a key role in this success.

Home lawns accounted for 75 percent of total turf acreage and 76 percent of maintenance expenses. "Homeowners spend an annual average of \$333 to maintain their lawns," said Watschke.

The majority of that amount pays for labor. Homeownership may be the American dream, but it also has become a challenge for adults who find themselves working longer hours to meet their mortgage payments.

"Dual-career couples don't have much time to work around the house," Watschke said. "Often they turn to lawn service compa-

nies to help them out."

Homeowners surveyed said that weeds constitute the biggest turf management problem, followed by poor soil and shade.

"It's fairly common for people to try to take care of a lawn problem on their own," said Watschke. "But then frustration sets in when they don't get proper results; and they turn to professional help. Some homeowners don't have the equipment, such as sprayers and spreaders, needed to tackle the problems."

Maintenance of turf along municipal and state roadsides cost Pennsylvania residents close to \$7 million in 1989. "Turf is used along roadsides for aesthetic reasons, but also for stabilization and erosion control," said Watschke. "If the grass wasn't there, the roads would slip into the ditch after a few hard rains."

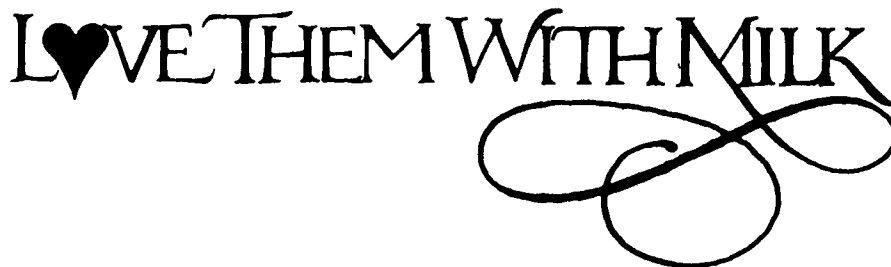
New and existing schools, parks, golf courses, airports, and cemeteries also have large turf acreage that needs to be maintained. This acreage will keep

expanding as the population increases, said Watschke.

"Money spent on lawn care is well invested," he said. "Turf increases real estate value and helps ensure safety of roadsides and recreational facilities.

"All those acres of green also play a crucial role in the environment," he said. "Turfgrass traps air pollutants and has a cooling effect in summer. It prevents stormwater runoff and protects water entering underground aquifers."

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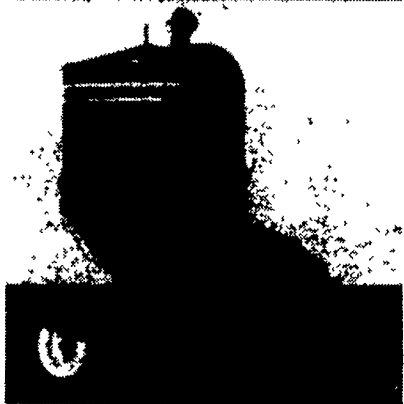
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