More Research on Fairway Problems Needed

Most of the golf turf experimental work has thus far been confined to problems affecting putting greens. This has been due to the demand for better turf on putting greens than elsewhere on the course, with the result that the problems confronting the greenkeeper in maintaining his putting greens have become more conspicuous than has usually been the case with his fairways. Nevertheless in recent years there has been a constant increase in the demand for information on fairway and tee problems. The development of tractor-drawn fairway mowing machinery, the increased use of fertilizers, and the more general installation of fairway watering systems have offered possibilities for far better fairway turf. They, however, have at the same time presented certain critical maintenance problems which were not apparent before these improvements were in general use.

Recognizing the need for such detailed information on fairway maintenance problems, the Green Section initiated some experimental work with bluegrass a few years ago. Some of the results obtained from this work were published in the Bulletin for November, 1931. The report there published indicated that improved mowing facilities might prove detrimental to fairway turf, since bluegrass under certain conditions was weakened by excessively close clipping. Further experimental work was continued by the Green Section at the laboratories of the University of Chicago, and additional reports of this work are included in the following pages.

In presenting these results the Green Section wishes to call attention to the fact that they are to be regarded as of a preliminary nature. Unfortunately budget retrenchments made it necessary for the Green Section to discontinue this experimental work before it could be thoroughly rechecked and coordinated. It is felt however that the results, even though incomplete, justify their presentation.

The purpose of this experimental work has been to analyze the various factors that contribute to the success or failure of growing fairway turf. General field observations are based on a great many conflicting factors; and since it is usually impossible to separate these factors, it is consequently impossible to reconcile many of the conflicting results that are reported. Much of this type of experimental work, namely the analyzing of separate factors, must of necessity be carried on in greenhouses, where temperature, moisture, and other factors can be better controlled and compared than under field conditions. These preliminary results further indicate that the indiscriminate use of fertilizers on fairways may be actually detrimental when fairways are too closely clipped. They also indicate that the acidity of the soil may have an important bearing on the utilization of the nitrogen that is already in the soil or of the nitrogen applied in fertilizers. Also temperature and the amount of light were found to have a direct effect on the growth of bluegrass, independent of the other factors that influence its growth.

It is to be regretted that more of this detailed information can not be obtained at this time, for undoubtedly much of the poor turf found on tees and fairways is due to improper cultural methods, based on misinformation. Unfortunately many of the remedies that are applied to correct these conditions probably are doing more harm than good.