



Spending A Little - Saving A Lot

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GOLF MAINTENANCE efficiency, American style, has never been easy. Demands for constant, high-quality playing conditions coupled with ever-restricting budgets and higher costs for essential supplies, places the superintendent right in the middle of the vice's grip. Seemingly, he has no escape.

Rising labor costs have caused reductions in manpower on many

courses over the last decade. To compensate, the superintendent turned to greater mechanization and thereby increased the worker's productivity. Men and machinery, in the right combinations, offer, if not an escape, at least some relief from the ever-tightening vice. The triplex putting green mower, multi-unit fairway gang mowers, and mechanical sand rakes are just a few of the pieces of equipment

that have helped turfgrass managers keep ahead of the game.

For a successful future, it will be even more essential for them to carefully analyze where the labor dollars are being spent **and** what pieces of equipment are now available to better accomplish the task. We will find we must Spend A Little (money) to Save A Lot (of time).



A green after hand mowers have been integrated into the mowing of the green. A good example of "Spending a Little Extra" for better turf.

But there is another aspect of spending a little to save a lot: it is spending time to properly train a golf course worker. Entire educational programs can be devoted to this subject. However, as there is increased emphasis on mechanization, there **must** also be corresponding emphasis on crew training. Remember, your workmen are operating expensive machines — \$20,000 worth or more — while accomplishing an important function that will either positively or negatively reflect on the appearance and playability of your golf turf. If the job is properly done, the course will look and play well.

As an agronomist with the USGA Green Section's Turf Advisory Service, I have the opportunity to see many different golf courses each year. The best maintained courses are those that

enjoy a high level of mechanization and an effectively trained crew. A golf course superintendent cannot do all the tasks on the course himself (even though he may want to). The workforce must be an extension of the superintendent's philosophy of golf course maintenance. This can only be accomplished through efficient crew training and motivation. Let your men know why and how you want a job done. Then, listen to what they have to say. Crew training and communication are a two-way street. Spend A Little (time to listen) and Save A Lot (of aggravation).

GOOD COMMUNICATION, motivation, and a pleasant working environment encourage an employee to be conscientious and have pride in his work. It takes that extra bit of caring to

transform a routine job into an important, effective one. Again, Spending A Little (time and effort) and Saving A Lot (in redoing the job).

Nevertheless, the cry for lower maintenance costs and increased operation efficiency is often reversed by the very same members of a particular golf club. And they have every right to out-vote and overpower themselves! For example, mechanization (in certain applications) may get the job done more efficiently, but it does not always produce the highest possible quality golfing turf. More and more golf courses are going back to hand mowing (i.e., using walking mowers) of putting greens, especially when seasonal labor is available. If not complete hand mowing, at least integrating hand and triplex mowers is now in increasing demand by private club members. On limited areas such as putting greens, this trade-off of efficiency for quality is apparently justified in their minds. They are willing to pay for it anyway!

An even greater contradiction, however, is now taking place on some golf courses in the northeast and central regions of this country. Here, recently, some clubs are mowing their fairways with triplex mowers and, in some instances, even collecting the clippings from them! While this operation is both labor and equipment intensive, the results in better fairway golfing turf have been spectacular. Again, these members seem willing to sacrifice cost efficiency for quality playing surfaces. It is a choice for each individual golf club to make. Surely, the turfgrass manager must not be taken to task for the increased cost of maintenance.

Each golf course is unique. Each must be maintained a little differently. All must balance men, machinery, materials and natural resources to produce quality golfing turf within a budget. Appropriate mechanization, automation, and continuous crew training are all essential elements. And then there are individual decisions each club must make and each turf manager must follow. Spend A Little to Save A Lot is worth remembering.