

individuals on the Green Section staff expressing their views on a variety of topics concerned with turfgrass science and golf course management. The subject matter will be intentionally stimulating and controversial, popular or not. It is designed to provoke the reader to consider and analyze new ideas and approaches, or to reconsider old truths that may have been forgotten in our fast-paced, high-tech world. Opinions will be those of the authors and not necessarily reflective of those of the USGA or Green Section. Depending on reader reaction to the editorials, selected responses may be published in future issues.

All things considered, we believe that establishing this column offers an excellent opportunity to clear the air on issues heretofore considered too controversial for the written word (or nearly so).



Attending the USGA Turfgrass Research Committee meeting at Golf House — Back row, left to right: Dr. Howard Kaerwar, F. Morgan Taylor, Charles Smith, Dr. Victor Gibeault, Gerald Faubel. Middle row: Tom Burton, Stanley Zontek, William Bengeyfield, James Snow. Front row: Bill Roberts, Dr. Paul Rieke, Dr. James Watson, Dr. Michael Kenna, Gary Watschke.

ALL THINGS CONSIDERED

Snake Oils

by JAMES FRANCIS MOORE

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THEY USED to call them snake oil salesmen, gypsy-like peddlers who traveled the country hawking a magic elixir that could cure everything from saddle sores to tuberculosis. Most often, these compounds were either highly alcoholic or contained opium derivatives. The relief experienced by the gullible client was at best temporary, but always long enough to allow the snake oil salesman to move on to the next town full of suckers.

We believe times have certainly changed. But have they? Regretfully, a tremendous amount of snake oil is still being hawked to turfgrass managers. A catchy name and a glossy brochure always accompany the peddler's claim that the new product can eliminate disease, insects, and weeds, and at the same time make the bunkers drain. A favorite technique is to spread the word around a state turf conference that "although the product is not labeled for use on greens, old Joe over at the country



James Francis Moore

club reduced his *Poa annua* by 20 percent during the first year." Even if this claim is completely without merit, sales of the product will temporarily skyrocket — at least long enough for the peddler to pocket some quick cash and move on to the next conference.

How do we protect ourselves against snake oils without unfairly discouraging

the introduction of new and beneficial ideas and products? Easy. Do not buy any new product sold by individuals whose claims cannot be substantiated by extensive university research. Good research is expensive and time consuming. Manufacturers of products claiming mystical powers simply cannot afford to submit their elixir to testing if they know it will fail.

Demanding evidence of good university research, however, will not completely eliminate the snake oils or the unscrupulous peddlers who sell them. Unfortunately, they are kept in business by those superintendents looking for an easy chemical solution to all of their turf management problems. In the words of the comedian George Carlin, "If you nail two things together that have never been nailed together before, some fool will buy it." All things considered, P. T. Barnum was probably right when he said, "There's a sucker born every minute."