

Chapter 1

Careers in the Turfgrass Industry

Professional careers in the turfgrass industry go back to the early days of golf course management. Men like Tom Morris—who worked as the greens keeper at the Old Course in St. Andrews, Scotland, before the turn of the century—and the early greens keepers in the United States were the pioneers of the field long before formal training in turfgrass management became available.

Today, formal training to prepare students for careers in the turfgrass industry is available from a wide variety of schools and universities in the United States, Canada, Scotland, and Wales (Anonymous, 2002a). There are also advanced degrees at the Masters of Science (M.S.) and/or Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) levels in turfgrass science and related fields available from more than 40 of the major agricultural universities.

THE GOLF INDUSTRY

The golf industry has traditionally been the career choice of most students in turfgrass management programs. This is still true today, and the majority of students entering programs in the United States generally declare golf as their primary interest (Figure 1.1).

The golf industry has undergone dramatic growth in the last few years, and there are presently more than 16,000 golf courses in the United States (Anonymous, 2002b). In 2000 alone, 524 new course projects opened, and it is projected that 325 new courses will open in 2002 (Joyner, 2002).

The golf industry is highly organized at both local and national levels. The Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA), located in Lawrence, Kansas, presently has more than 21,000 members. There are also affiliated chapters available to individuals in every state except Alaska. The national organization has a well-organized certification program and an educational division that provides more than 160 national and regional seminars each year. Their web site is located at <http://www.gcsaa.org/>.

2 FUNDAMENTALS OF TURFGRASS MANAGEMENT

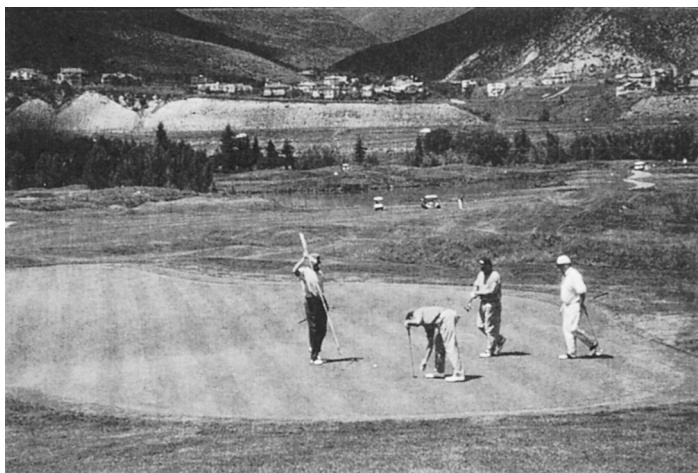


Figure 1.1 Golf course maintenance is one of the most popular areas of turfgrass management.

SPORTS FIELD MANAGEMENT

Sports field management is a profession that has undergone a rapid increase in interest among students in recent years. This field did not receive much attention in the 1960s and 1970s, because of the use of artificial turf on most college and professional athletic fields during that time. In the last 15 years, many of these artificial fields have been converted to natural turf. These are generally fields that have modified rootzones, special drainage systems, and complex irrigation systems that require a well-trained manager. This has opened many jobs for turf professionals, and sports turf management is likely to be one of the fastest growing areas of the turf industry in the next few years (Figure 1.2).

There is now a national Sports Turf Managers Association, located in Council Bluffs, Iowa, which has over 2200 national and international members. There are also 23 affiliated chapters that provide education and services to sports field managers. Their current web site is <http://www.sportsturfmanager.com/my/shared/home.jsp/>.

LAWN CARE

Professional lawn care is another important field that employs students trained in turfgrass management (Figure 1.3). Golf course and sports field management appear to be more exciting to many students, and few declare lawn care as their career goal when they enter the program. However, the ready availability of jobs in every region of the country and the competitive starting



Figure 1.2 Sports turf management is a field that is attracting more students every year. (Courtesy of Jeff Salmond.)

salaries that the lawn care industry offers attract many students following graduation. Lawn care also provides good opportunities for advancement in larger companies that have division supervisors and regional managers.

Professional lawn care also offers the chance for entrepreneurs to start their own business. While the boom period of lawn care that occurred in the 1970s and 1980s has leveled off, there are still many opportunities for those with a good work ethic and the management skills required to run a business.



Figure 1.3 Lawn care is an area of turfgrass management that continues to attract many students each year. (Courtesy of Dr. David Minner.)

4 FUNDAMENTALS OF TURFGRASS MANAGEMENT

Lawn care is a highly organized profession, with both national and local organizations serving thousands of member companies. The Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA), located in Marietta, Georgia, has an active education program for its 1200 member companies and holds a national conference each year that is attended by lawn care professionals from every region of the country. Their current web site is <http://www.plcaa.org/>.

SOD PRODUCTION

Sod production has traditionally not employed large numbers of turfgrass management students following graduation. However, there are regions, such as Florida, California, the Midwest, and parts of the Northeast, where a thriving sod industry does provide a significant number of professional jobs.

Like lawn care, the sod industry is a field that appeals to the entrepreneur (Figure 1.4). Many of the students with an expressed interest in sod production are those who plan to start their own business or who plan to add sod production to an already existing nursery or landscape operation. The sod market is highly dependent on the construction industry, which varies with the economy. Sod production can be very profitable in regions where there is consistent expansion.

The sod producers, like the professionals in the other areas of turf management, are very well organized. The Turfgrass Producers International (TPI), located in Rolling Meadow, Illinois, presently has around 1200 members in 36 countries. Their current web site is <http://www.turfgrassod.org/>.



Figure 1.4 Sod production offers professional jobs to turf students and provides the opportunity to start their own business.

GROUPS MAINTENANCE

General grounds maintenance of turf areas around industrial areas, large apartment complexes, corporate headquarters, and similar businesses is often overlooked by turfgrass management students (Figure 1.5). There are, however, some excellent opportunities in this field. Benefit and pay packages are often consistent with other professional positions offered by these companies, and these jobs are generally very competitive with those available in other segments of the turf industry.

SALES

Sales of chemicals, equipment, and other products used in the turf industry is a professional area that requires individuals with technical training in the field. These jobs also require good communication skills and a knowledge of the business world. These positions offer the opportunity for relatively high income to the right person.

In past years, it has been rare to find a turfgrass management student with a specific goal of pursuing a career in sales. This seems to be changing, however, and it is now common to find students who plan their curriculum to meet the requirements of a sales job.

OTHER FIELDS

There are also a few areas related to the turf industry that provide careers for those with the right technical background combined with other talents



Figure 1.5 Grounds maintenance provides students the opportunity to work with turf and to gain experience with a wide variety of landscape plants. (Courtesy of Dr. Wayne Hefley.)

and training. One of these is the field of technical writing for the publications that serve the industry. There are several magazines and newsletters directed at the turf industry that have positions for those with good technical knowledge of the field.

The Turf and Ornamental Communicators Association (TOCA), located in New Prague, Minnesota, is the professional organization for the editors, writers, photographers, public relations practitioners, and others involved in publishing information for the industry. This group has a competitive scholarship program that is open to all students interested in writing for the green industry. For more information on TOCA, see <http://www.toca.org/>.

ADVANCED DEGREES

For those who wish to pursue their education beyond the Bachelor of Science (B.S.) degree, there are Master of Science (M.S.) and Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) degrees available at many of the major agricultural universities (Figure 1.6). The M.S. degree generally takes two years beyond the four-year B.S. degree, and the Ph.D. generally takes another three to four years beyond the M.S. degree.

The M.S. degree provides expanded job opportunities in the research and development field (Figure 1.7). Fertilizer and pesticide companies often hire individuals with M.S. degrees for product development and regional sales positions. Community colleges and other two-year institutions provide teaching jobs for students with M.S. degrees, and many high-quality two-year



Figure 1.6 Graduate students working with research samples in the greenhouse.



Figure 1.7 Graduate students are often given the opportunity to speak to professional groups about their research.

turfgrass management programs in the United States are handled by teachers with an MS degree.

The Ph.D. degree can lead to a career in university teaching, research, or extension. There are also a variety of research and development positions in the turf industry that employ individuals with Ph.D. degrees. Employment prospects for students completing Ph.D. degrees with a specialization in turfgrass science have been excellent in recent years, and the outlook for the future appears to be excellent as well.

LITERATURE CITED

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